

## The Way to Wholeness

by Ray C. Stedman

Since we have all come back from vacation rested, refreshed, and ready to go, it is appropriate that we start a study together in the book of Leviticus – because you need to be rested to take on Leviticus.

I do not know what your reaction is to this book but I suspect that some of you are not too excited about it. This is where most people bog down when they start reading through the Bible. You go through Genesis in fine style, learning about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the things that happened to them. Then you get into Exodus where you have such dramatic incidents as Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh in the court of Egypt, the opening of the Red Sea, and the giving of the Law. Then you start into Leviticus. After you have plodded through the offerings you get into the priesthood, the ceremonies, all the restrictions of diet and specifications for the dress of the high priest, and various other strange functions and feasts. About that time your interest evaporates, you run out of gas, and that is the end of your reading through the Bible. Isn't that right? I think that is the experience of many.

Well, I can understand that. I know that this book is a bit difficult. It does appear to be very dry. It could be called *the dryness barrier*. If you can penetrate *the dryness barrier* you will find the Bible a fascinating book indeed to read all the way through.

Leviticus reminds me of visiting a factory without a guide.

When I first came to this area I went to San Francisco where Ed Stirm, one of the founders of this church, had a large steel products factory. I went into the factory to see what they were doing. Ed was busy at the moment and couldn't come with me so I went by myself.

My first impression as I stepped into the huge building was of tremendous clamor. The noise was fantastic! There were great machines pounding away, big trip hammers smashing down, and other machines grinding up metal and spitting out parts. I couldn't even hear myself think.

My second impression was of mass confusion. Nobody seemed to know what they were doing. Men were running here and there, paying no attention to one another, some getting in the way of others, and the machines were all working away with no apparent harmony or connection at all.

Then Mr. Stirm joined me, and began to take me through the plant. He showed me first one corner and explained what they were doing there, and then a certain machine and what it did. We continued in this way until we ended up in the shipping department where the final product was visible. When I saw the final product I then understood the factory.

It all made perfect sense. I was no longer confused.

This is what you may experience with the book of Leviticus. You come into it and find many strange ceremonies and sacrifices, many odd restrictions, diet problems, and various other difficulties which all seem to be so meaningless. But then you discover that they have a very complex, intricately articulated relationship moving toward a purposeful end. That end is stated clearly in this book and I want to start with it this morning. If you want to understand Leviticus, one verse right near the center of the book will help you. It is found in the 20th chapter, the 26th verse. Let's read it together:

**“You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” {Lev 20:26 RSV}**

That is the purpose of the book of Leviticus.

God is saying to these people of Israel, “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from all the nations around you in order that you might be mine.” When we Christians read this we must understand that we are the people of God today. What God said to Israel he also says to us, for in the new relationship we have in Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile – there is but one man, one body in Christ. The promises which appear in picture form in the Old Testament belong also to us who live this side of the cross. We will see more of this as we go on.

Perhaps you were turned off right away by the word holy in this passage. I do not know what you think holy means. You probably read into it things from your past experience which make it unpalatable to you. Most of us associate it with some kind of grimness. We think of holy people as those who look as if they have been steeped in vinegar or soaked in embalming fluid. I used to think of the word that way, and holiness was not attractive to me at all. It repelled me. But I ran across a verse in Scripture which spoke of “the beauty of holiness” {cf, 1 Chr 16:29, 2 Chr 20:21, Psa 29:2, 96:2}. I asked myself, “What in the world is beautiful about holiness?” When I found out I agreed that holiness is indeed a beautiful thing.

But most of us react initially to this word as did the little girl who happened to see a mule looking over the fence at her. She had never seen a mule before, and she said to it, “I don't know what

you are, but you must be a Christian – you look just like Grandpa.”

Others associate it with strangeness, apartness, as though holy people are weird, peculiar individuals who live out in the desert somewhere, remote from the rest of us. We think of them as “different.”

But the Bible itself suggests none of these ideas concerning holiness. If you want to get at the meaning of this word you must go back to its original root. This word is derived from the same root from which a very attractive English word comes. This is the word *wholeness*. So that *holiness* means “wholeness,” being complete. And if you read *wholeness* in place of *holiness* everywhere you find it in the Bible you will be much closer to what the writers of that book meant. We all know what *wholeness* is:

- it is to have together all the parts which were intended to be there,
- and to have them functioning as they were intended to function.

That is what God is talking about. He says to this people, “you shall be whole, because I am whole.” God is complete; he is perfect. There is no blemish in God; he lives in harmony with himself. He is a beautiful person. He is absolutely what a person ought to be. He is filled with joy and love and peace. He lives in wholeness. And he looks at us in our brokenness and says to us, “You, too, shall be whole.”

That word *wholeness* has power to awaken desire within us. We long to be whole people. Don't you? Don't you want to be what God made you to be, with all the ingredients of your personality able to be expressed in balance. That is to be a beautiful person, and that is what God is after. That is what the book of Leviticus is all about. In fact, the whole Bible is on that theme.

We are so aware of our own brokenness, of our lack of wholeness. We know how much we hurt ourselves and each other. We are aware of our inability to cope with life. We sometimes put up a big facade and try to bluff our way through as though we are able to handle anything. But inside, half the time, we are running scared. That is a mark of our lack of wholeness. We also know our diabolical power to irritate, to enrage, and to inflame others – and ourselves. But this great state-

ment in Leviticus 20:26 declares that God knows all about human brokenness and hurt. He knows that we are that way. He sees this in sharp contrast to his own wholeness. And his love reaches out and says to us, “You shall be whole; for I am whole.” “That is my purpose,” he declares to his people.

Man has lost his way. He was made in the image and likeness of God. When man first came from the hand of God he was whole. Adam functioned as God intended man to function. He was functioning in the image and the likeness of God. But now we have lost that likeness. We still have the image, but the likeness is gone. T. S. Eliot says,

All our knowledge brings us only closer to our  
ignorance,  
And our ignorance brings us closer to death.  
But closeness to death does not bring us closer  
to God.

And then he asks this question:

Where is the life we have lost in living?

Isn't that the question so many millions are asking today: Where is the life I have lost in trying to live? Why don't I know the way out? How come I am so up tight, so hurting, so broken?

God determines to heal man's brokenness and to make man whole again. And he knows how to do it – he says so: “You shall be whole; for I am whole, and I have separated you from the peoples.” It is a process of separation. The reason we are so broken is that we are involved in a broken race:

- Our attitudes are wrong.
- Our vision of life is twisted and distorted.
- We believe illusions, take them to be facts, and act upon them.
- We are following phantoms and fantasies and delusions.

So God must separate us.

He has to break us loose from conformity to the thought patterns and the attitudes and reactions of those around us. He has to deliver us from all that, straighten out our thinking, set our minds and hearts aright, and correct our tangled, fouled relationships.

This is a process which takes infinite patience and love, because it is voluntary – God never forces us into it. It can occur only to those who trust God enough to respond to his love.

When I was a boy in my early teens I once tried to entice a female deer out of a thicket into a little clearing and to get her to take an apple from my hand and eat it. She was a wild doe, and very much afraid. She saw the apple and obviously wanted to come and take it – but she was afraid. She would venture a few steps toward me but then would become frightened and retreat into the woods. Then she would come out again, stand still and look around for a minute, then start grazing as though indifferent. I stood perfectly still, holding out the apple. She would come a bit closer – then a twig would snap and she would disappear back into the bushes.

Now, it was perfectly possible for her all along, if only she had known it, simply to walk right up and grab the apple and start eating it. I would not have hurt her at all. I wouldn't have tried to capture her, nor have done anything else to her. But she didn't know that.

I was there a long time, at least half an hour, trying to get her to come out of the woods. Finally she came about halfway toward me and stood there with her neck stretched out, trying to muster the courage to reach for that apple. Just as I thought she was going to do it a car passed nearby and she was gone! I had to eat the apple myself.

That strikes me as such an apt picture of what God contends with in reaching out toward man. It takes infinite patience and love to impart the necessary understanding to fearful, hurting men and women like us.

That is why God gave us his Book. He starts in kindergarten with us. He starts with pictures and shadows, with visual aids, in order to show us what he is going to do some day. All the ceremonies and offerings of the Old Testament are shadows and pictures of Jesus Christ. So Christ is here in the book of Leviticus. God shows us, through his people Israel, his way of healing human hurt. This is God's way to wholeness.

“Well,” someone might say, “I thought Jesus Christ was God's way to wholeness.” That is exactly true. He is. But his availability is not limited to us, you see. Men and women before the cross

were also hurting and broken and fragmented, just as we are. They needed Christ also and he was available to them. The way they saw him was through these pictures. Thus, as they understood what these pictures depict, and laid hold of that, they came to the same joy and peace that we have.

If you do not believe that, then read the Psalms and see how much David understood of the presence and the grace of God in his life. He was a man who was healed by God. He came to understand that God was his strength and his very life, and that God could meet every need of his heart and work out all the tangled relationships in his family and in his personal life. He reflects all this in the Psalms he wrote.

Leviticus, then, is full of Christ. All the sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies, and all the rest, pictorially describe Jesus Christ and his work, and how he was available to men and women then. And as we read this book from our vantage on this side of the cross we will learn a great deal about how Jesus Christ can meet our needs now. Therefore, this is not just a historical book. It isn't just for Jews. It is a tremendously practical manual on how to live as a Christian. We will see this as we go along.

But there is even more: When you read the book of Leviticus, and understand what it is saying, it will help you to understand yourself. You see, in Jesus Christ God took upon himself the form of man. Jesus came to this earth, God in the flesh, and dwelt among us as man – man as God intends man to be. He came to where we are. And everything that he was and did as man is what we also are or can be. So, as you read this book you will understand more about yourself, and about what your great, crying needs are, and about how you operate.

We are a mystery to ourselves. We don't even understand how we think. We are baffled by our own experience. Don't you feel that way? Remember the way Paul expresses this in Romans 7: "The good things that I want to do I cannot do; and the evil things that I don't want to do are what I do," {cf, Rom 7:19 RSV}. This is a picture of life. It is a very penetrating, probing analysis of what is going on in your life and mine. This is what the book of Leviticus will show us – the reasons why, the understanding of ourselves. It is designed to meet the hurt of man, just where we are. And as

we learn how to accept the healing of God it will show us what we can be.

Because that is true, the book falls into two basic divisions. The first part speaks to man's need. It reveals where we are as people, and sets forth God's answer to that need. The second part reveals what God expects from us in response. First comes God's provision, and then the performance which results from that provision. This morning we will undertake only a brief survey of the book so that you will have a guide to it. We won't go into any detail.

In the first sixteen chapters there are four elements which set forth **man's need** and reveal what we are like:

1. The first is *a series of five offerings*. I am sure that God gave us five fingers on each hand so that we can remember the five offerings:
  - First is the burnt offering,
  - then the meal offering,
  - the peace offering,
  - the sin offering, and, finally,
  - the trespass offering.

These are all pictures of what Jesus Christ does for us. But they are also pictures of the great, fundamental needs of human life. We can summarize them in this way: These five offerings speak of the two essentials for human existence – love and responsibility:

- We can never be complete persons if we are not loved, or if we do not love. Love is an absolutely essential ingredient of life. Nothing harms or distorts or disfigures or blasts a person more than to deny him love. But there is another essential, too.
- In order to be whole, in order to have self-respect and a feeling of worth we must have a sense of responsibility. We must be able to accomplish what is worthwhile.

We need both love and responsibility. These offerings describe them and show us how they work.

2. The second element in these chapters is *a priesthood*. This priesthood is provided to help us handle the emotional and intellectual problems which we face in trying to work out the relationships involving love and responsibility.

All of us, even the children among us, have lived long enough to know that, when we try to live, we constantly run into emotional and intellectual problems. We get upset, we get turned off, or turned on, we get excited, or depressed – we have all kinds of emotional problems. And we get puzzled and bewildered, baffled and uncertain as to what to do – all kinds of intellectual problems. So a priesthood is provided to help us with these problems.

In the Old Testament this priesthood was the sons of Levi. That is where Leviticus got its name. But for us the priesthood is not only Jesus Christ, our Lord and High Priest to whom we can freely come, but it is also each other. In the body of Christ, we are all made priests – one to another. That is why we need each other. Basically and fundamentally we cannot get along without each other, because we have these problems with which we must be helped.

3. The third element is *the revelation of a standard* by which we can tell the difference between the true and the false, the phony and the real, the helpful and the hurtful, between death and life.

Isn't it strange that man in his natural condition cannot tell the difference? That is why there are thousands and thousands of people who are doing things which they think are helpful but which end up to be very hurtful – and they do not understand why! When the results begin to come in they cry out and say, "What's happened, what has gone wrong? Why am I in a mess like this?" It is because they could not tell the difference.

So a God of love tells us the difference. He sets forth a standard by which we can distinguish between that which is essentially hurtful and that which will actually help us.

4. Finally, in this first section there is *an opportunity to respond* – voluntarily. We need that, too.

God never imposes his will upon any of us. We constantly need help. And we need to be brought to a place where we can recognize this. Then we have to answer in some way, we must give a response. This opportunity was provided in the Day of Atonement, as we will see. If, when we thoroughly understand our need and God's provision to meet it, we then say "No" to him, he will let us do so. And we might never return to that point again.

But God always gives us a long period of preparation in which he leads us into a full understanding before our rejection of him can become final.

The second section of the book, Chapters 17 through 27, describes **the performance which is possible** on the basis of the provision God has made, i.e., the kind of a life that can be lived on this basis. But notice the order! God never mentions performance to us until he has fully discussed provision. He never speaks about our behavior until he has made clear the power by which we are to act.

I must admit that we in the church often get this backwards. And a great deal of damage has been done to people by insisting that they act according to a certain behavior pattern without giving them any understanding of the power by which to do so. There are times when, in all sincerity, and because we don't understand the Scriptures very well, we actually teach people that they must live up to a certain standard before God will accept them, that they must produce, come through, or God won't love them. That is totally wrong! That is the lie of Satan! That is deadly legalism – yet we all have all had our part in it.

But that is what God is here to correct. He never does that. He always helps us first, and once we understand the basis upon which to act, then he sets forth for us the pattern, the standard of performance.

Here again there are four elements:

1. First there is the understanding of *the basis for wholeness*. This basis is blood. Anyone who has read the Old Testament knows that it is full of blood. There are all these strange sacrifices, thousands of them offered every year – bulls and calves and goats and sheep and birds of all

kinds, offered up all the time – a veritable river of blood flowing through the Old Testament.

Many people, looking at this, say, “Well, Christianity is nothing but a slaughterhouse religion.” Why is all this blood shed?

Because by this means God is trying to impress us with a fundamental fact: He is telling us that the issues of our life run very deep, that they can be solved only by a death, that the basis for wholeness is life given up, that we will never make it merely on the basis of our natural life. We must somehow discover a new kind of life. And we have to give up the old before we can have the new!

That is what he is telling us. We can’t have both! The struggle of the Christian life is that we keep trying to hang on to the old way of life and refuse to accept the new. This is what the blood speaks of. We will understand this more fully when we come to it in our study.

2. The second element is *the practice of love in all the relationships of life*.

The Bible, you see, is intensely practical. It is not nearly so concerned about what you do in the temple as about what you do in the home as a result of having been to the temple. So this book goes into the relationships within the family, among friends, and with society in general. It shows us exactly the kind of love relationship that God makes possible for us in all these areas.

3. The third element in this last section is *the enjoyment of the presence and power of God – man in relationship to God, worshipping God, and turned on by a living, exciting God!*

We will learn what the temple portrays about our relationship to God and about how to think of him. The most important thing in life is to know the living God who is behind all things!

4. The last element is *an awareness of the issues at stake*, of how important they are, of how our entire life stands in the balance at this very point, and of the fact that a decision is expected. There is a choice that we can make. And God brings us finally to that very place

and helps us to see that in the final analysis it is entirely up to us to choose.

God never says, “I’m going to make you leave your misery.” Rather, he says, “If you prefer being broken and don’t want to be healed you can stay right where you are. But if you want life, then this is what is ahead.” God never forces his will upon us. But he sets the choice before us, makes it very clear, and then expects a response on the basis that he has given.

In closing we should return to our key verse: “You shall be whole because I am whole, and therefore I am separating you from the peoples, in order that you should be mine,” {cf, Lev 20:26}. That, finally, is what God is aiming at. He wants us to be his.

Here the verb tense becomes very interesting. In our English text this is in the future tense: “you shall be mine.” But the Hebrew has a strange usage, very different from English. You can put all three tenses in one word, and that is what we have here. God is saying, “You were mine, you are mine, you shall be mine.” “Mine,” he says, that’s all: “MINE!” It includes all the tenses of life – the past, the present, and the future.

If you pursue this idea through the Bible you can see how true it is:

- Many of you know from your own experience that after you became a Christian, became God’s, you realized that there was a sense in which you had belonged to him all along. Paul the Apostle says, “God separated me unto himself from my mother’s womb,” {cf, Gal 1:15}. And yet he was a blustering, threatening enemy of Christianity until his experience on the road to Damascus. But, looking back, he knew that he was God’s all along. “You are mine,” God says. “Even though you are an enemy, even though you are against me, hostile to me, and fighting me, you are MINE!”
- Then, in the present tense, God looks at us in our brokenness, our hurting condition, our fragmented, flawed, imperfect state, and he puts his hand upon us and says, “You are mine, right now, just the way you are. You belong to me!”

Last Sunday at Mount Hermon Christian Conference Center a friend of mine told a story which I had never heard before. It is of a true incident which I think is so illustrative of this. He told of a service at a rescue mission in a midwestern city a few years ago. It was a service for children, in which children were putting on the program. One little boy was to give a recitation. He was only about five or six years old and he had a deformity, a terribly misshapen back, a humpback. As he walked across the stage to give his recitation it was evident that he was very nervous, very shy and afraid, and very much aware of his condition. In fact, it was the first time that he had ever tried anything like this and it was a great struggle for him. Two older fellows had come into the back of the room intending to ridicule the service. One of them called out to this boy as he walked across the stage, "Hey, son, where are you going with that pack on your back?" The little boy was completely demoralized and he began to cry. He just stood up there and sobbed. A man got up out of the audience and came up to the platform. He knelt down by the little boy and put his arm around him. He said to the audience, "It must take a very callous and cruel person to say something like that to a little boy like this. He is suffering from something that is not his fault at all. He does have this deformity and despite it he was trying for the first time to venture out and say something in public. And now this remark has cut him deeply. But I want you to know that this little boy is mine. I love him just the way he is. He belongs to me, and I'm proud of him." And he led the boy off the platform.

That is what God is saying to us. That is what he is really saying! He sees our hurt and our heartache and our longing and our brokenness, and he says, "You're MINE!"

- But that isn't all. Because of his power and wisdom God says, with that wonderful hopefulness of a loving father, "You shall be mine, healed, made whole, with all you blemishes and deformities corrected, all your faults straightened out, all your iniquities set aside, all your tangled relationships unsnarled. You are going to be mine. You shall be whole, for I am

whole." That is what this book is about, that is what the Bible is about, and that is what Jesus Christ is about.

This past week I had the encouraging experience of talking with three people who, two years ago, I would have said were absolutely hopeless. I would not have given a snap of my fingers for their chances of ever being straightened out because of the mess they had made of their lives. They were hostile and rebellious and so torn up inside that they could not get along with themselves or anybody else. No one could even talk to them, let alone reach them with the truth. They were ruined, literally ruined. But now the healing has begun. It is very evident that they are on their way to wholeness. God is correcting the problems of their lives. And that is what he is doing here with us.

I don't know anything more suggestive of this for us than the Lord's table, to which we now come. This event tells us of how God, in love, began the process of healing. It portrays for us how he began to reach out to us in the cross, in the suffering of Jesus, and how he broke the power of darkness and began to set us free. So we will observe this event which our Lord Jesus gave us to teach us the meaning of these ancient sacrifices: a life poured out for us, a life given up in order that we might have a new basis of living. That is what wholeness is all about. It is in order that we may be his.

### **Prayer:**

Our heavenly Father, as we come to this service we ask you to make it very rich and meaningful to us. May we, in our mind's eye, see the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who has broken through the sin barrier, broken through the fear barrier, and now reaches out to us in tender, forgiving, accepting, understanding love, and who offers us everything it takes to straighten out the tangled relationships of our lives. Lord, help us to understand this and to lay hold of it, to give thanks for it. We know that for many of us the healing has begun but is still progress-

ing. For some it is just beginning. There may be some for whom it has not yet started. We pray that this may be the mo-

ment when your love, Lord Jesus, will reach them and heal them. We ask it in your name, Amen.

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## The Need to Belong

by Ray C. Stedman

Last week we started our studies together in the book of Leviticus, this fearsome book which many of you have attempted to read before, perhaps, but have given up on because it seems to deal only with apparently meaningless regulations, sacrifices, and rituals. But these are *pictures* which portray truth which God wants us to know. I hope that you recognize that the Old Testament is filled with these pictures. They are called *types*. They prefigure something yet to come. The New Testament calls them *shadows*, {cf, Col 2:17, Heb 8:5, 10:1}. Just as a shadow takes the form of the object which casts it, so these ceremonies and rituals are shadows of something yet to happen.

When you read the Old Testament you can't help but see the emphasis laid upon the future. "Someone is coming," these Old Testament shadows and pictures and types are saying to us. We know, of course, that they are pointing toward the coming of Jesus Christ. That in itself is a most remarkable testimony to the divine authorship of this book. Only God could have prescribed offerings which so accurately depict the coming of Jesus. As we go through them you will see that this is true.

These pictures are a kind of visual aid which God uses to impress truth upon our minds. After all, we human beings are not very smart. We think we are, at times, because we can invent some rather complicated gadgetry. But, in contrast to the vastness of the knowledge which remains undetected, and to the wisdom and greatness of God, our minds are very puny and weak and we have really learned very little. And so God teaches us like children. Kindergarten teachers never start out by writing complex mathematical formulas on the blackboard for the children to learn. They must start with simple arithmetic, using pictures to illustrate the

concepts involved. This is the way God has started teaching us – with these types and shadows.

He uses nature for this purpose as well. Last night I went out under the sky and looked up into the stars. I felt, as you have often felt, a sense of wonder and awe. Especially if you can get to a place where there is no artificial light to interfere, and the heavens are blazing in beauty above you, you can feel the mystery of the wisdom and the power of God. The night sky is God's overhead projector, by which he is teaching us truth about himself. The same is true all the way through nature and all through the Bible as well.

In Leviticus we will learn to understand some of these pictures. But they also appear in other books. Just before Leviticus comes Exodus, the book which tells the story of Israel's redemption out of Egypt:

- They were in slavery and bondage under a cruel and vicious king. This stands forever in Scripture as a picture of enslavement to Satan, of bondage to sin, of the cruelty, hurt, and heartache that comes upon anybody who has not yet found deliverance. All this is graphically portrayed, as you can see, in the story of Israel in Egypt.
- And then, by means of the Passover, when he sheltered his people under the blood, and the angel of death passed over them, God began to set them free. Through a series of mighty works he led them out of Egypt.
- That is a beautiful picture of what happens to an individual who comes to know Jesus Christ. He is set free from sin.

In Exodus it is also recorded that God gave Israel two more great pictures which convey marvelous truths that they needed to know.

1. One was the Law. You remember that terrible scene when Israel gathered as a people before Mount Sinai. A trumpet began to sound. I think it must have been very much like an air raid siren today – so intense that the people could not stand it.

The mountain smoked, flames covered it, it trembled and shook with great earthquakes, and the people were terrified. God said to Moses, “Come up here; I want to talk to you!” And Moses went up on that mountain alone. I have never envied him that trip. That was a fearsome encounter to go into. But there God gave him the Law.

The Ten Commandments are nothing more than the revelation of the kind of people that God expects us to be, or, in other words, the kind he designed. He made humanity to do the kinds of things which are recorded in the Ten Commandments {Exod 20:3-17}.

Some of the commandments pertain to our relationship with him:

- “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”
- “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

Others deal with our relationships with our neighbors:

- “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”
- “Thou shalt not steal.”
- “Thou shalt not bear false witness...”

Those are merely a description of what God intends us to be. They come with remarkable force upon humanity because there is something in us which recognizes that they are right. God has, in a sense, written aspects of the Law into every human heart. This is why everywhere in the world, no matter what culture you observe, you will find a sense of responsibility and accountability to God, an awareness that man is expected to be something and that he ought to be what he is expected to be. This “oughtness” is in evidence everywhere in the human race.

2. Along with the Law, God gave to Moses the pattern of a building, the tabernacle. He told him, “Don’t vary the pattern; build it exactly as I have told you!” The reason for that is that the tabernacle, as we learn from the book of Hebrews, is the picture of man and of what God intends to do and to be in man, which is to live in us.

So he designed the tabernacle like he built us – in three sections: We have

- spirit,
- soul, and
- body.

In the tabernacle there was:

- the outer court, which corresponds to the body,
- the holy place, corresponding to the soul, and
- the holy of holies, which represents that unfathomable, mysterious place deep in our human spirit which we call “the unconscious” and from which everything keeps rising, like bubbles from the bed of a lake, and breaking upon the surface of our life.

So God designed the tabernacle in order that we might understand ourselves.

And his purpose was to live there. In the tabernacle was a bright, shining, uncreated light called the Shekinah which was the mark of the presence of God. Now, it was only a picture of God; it was not God himself. No man can see God. But the light reminded Israel that this is where God intends to dwell – in man.

The Law from the Mount of Sinai was the Old Covenant. God has said to man, “This is what you ought to be.” Thus the Law made a demand upon men. And it was absolutely inflexible. God said, in effect, “Any deviation from this Law must be punished because it means that you are failing to be what you were made to be, and this can’t be ignored!” And man said, “All right, we’ll keep the Law.” And everybody girded up their loins and said, “If God wants us to do this, this is what we’re going to do!” And they tried. But what they had failed to take into consideration was the very thing that people are still failing to recognize today. It is

that someone has thrown a monkey wrench into the machinery. Man is fallen!

The Law is like the instruction book for operating your automobile. But it is as if every time you try to run it according to the instruction book, you discover that somebody has put water in the gasoline, and sand in the oil, and nothing will work quite right. So the Law becomes a demand that can never be met. This is why God, after the tabernacle was built, gave a whole series of sacrifices as a picture of the New Covenant, the new arrangement for living, in which a death would occur, and a priest would be present to help us with our emotional and intellectual problems, and he would make it possible for us to live with a wholesome God even though we had been violators and breakers of the Law which he had set before us. That is what these sacrifices are all about.

Now, they were just shadows. They weren't the real thing. The real thing is Jesus Christ. These are a picture of Christ, of his coming and having done a work in our life. And as people observed them they were doing the equivalent of what we do when we believe in Christ and accept his work for us.

That is why the book of Leviticus opens with these words:

**The LORD called Moses, and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, [the tabernacle] saying, "Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of cattle from the herd or from the flock." {Lev 1:1-2 RSV}**

Here is the introduction to the offerings.

Notice that this whole system of sacrifices was never given from Sinai. It was given from the tabernacle, the place where God had come to live with man. This is significant for us. God never placed the demand of the Law upon us without also intending to meet it from within, from the life of Jesus Christ within us – God dwelling in us. Therefore all of this is God's provision for meeting the problem of the breaking of the Law – the problem of guilt, of condemnation, self-hatred and all the other afflictions which come to us from within, and which keep us from being the kind of whole persons that God made us to be.

There are five offerings, as we saw last week: the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace of-

fering, the trespass offering and the sin offering. We are going to look at them individually. All five represent aspects of the work of Jesus Christ. If you want to read ahead and study these through you will find it very instructive to do so because the more you learn on your own the more it all will mean to you.

This morning we want to look at the first offering, the basic one. But before we get to it, if you will be patient with me for just a while longer, we need to do a bit more donkey work.

In the course of these studies I want to show you that each of these offerings followed a pattern which was fulfilled when Jesus Christ became man and died on the cross, thus meeting the requirements of God. We will see that, but we also want to get behind that. Because when Jesus died so he was also taking our place. One of the great truths of the gospel is that when Jesus died he became exactly what we are, just before he died. That, in fact, is why God put him to death. Therefore each of these offerings is a revelation of what we are, as fallen human beings, as bearers of Adamic life. So if you want to understand yourself then take heed of these offerings. They represent what Jesus Christ had to become in order to help us, and that is what we are.

The first offering is the burnt offering. It followed a five-step pattern, like all the rest of the offerings.

- a) First a selection of the sacrifice had to be made. If an animal sacrifice were required then either a male or a female had to be chosen. In the case of the burnt offering, as we will see, it was always a male. It had to be without blemish, without any kind of disfigurement at all. Animals were the most valuable possession of these nomadic Hebrew people. It was a costly sacrifice taken from their treasure, their animals.
- b) Then, after selecting it they laid their hands on it. What does that mean? Well, that is God's way of teaching the great truth of substitution, the fact that we human beings are all tied together with each other, that we belong to one another and share life together, and that there is a way by which one of us can substitute for another. Now,

in the case of dealing with our deepest guilt that substitute had to be a spotless, sinless person. And the only human being who ever fulfilled that qualification was Jesus Christ. That is why he is the only one who can redeem us. But there are other ways in which we are linked together. And this rite of identification, the laying on of hands, is God's expressive way of teaching that we belong to each other. That is why when we send someone out on a mission we bring them up front here and lay hands on them. By that we are saying, "We're with you, Brother! We are going to be praying for you and helping you to meet your need for financial support, whatever it is. We belong together in this project!"

- c) The third step was to kill the animal involved immediately. God never allowed any compromise on this. He did not say, "This is a nice, cute little lamb, and he is innocent of any wrongdoing himself. So if you'll just drain a half pint of blood from him I'll be satisfied." God would never say such a thing because he wants to impress upon us the fact that the problem he is dealing with is so intense and so deeply rooted in our human lives that nothing but death can solve it. It cannot be palliated by some temporary expedient. It requires the immediate death of the substitutionary animal.
- d) The fourth step was the sprinkling of the blood, or the burning of the portions of the sacrifice, as an act of consecration, of commitment to God. You see, the instant one of these animals died it became acceptable to God. Death solved the problem of separation, of alienation, and then the sacrifice could be offered to God.
- e) The final step was a ceremonial indication of a restored relationship. Usually they sat down and ate part of the meat of the sacrifice. This was where the Hebrew people got their meat dishes, for they could eat only the meat of their sacrifices, that is all. Every animal they killed had to be slain at the door of the tent of meeting. There were

some offerings, like the burnt offering, from which they could not eat. But with these God gave them other means of indicating that the relationship was restored and that there was peace again.

Now let's focus our attention upon **the burnt offering**. This was the most frequently offered sacrifice in Israel. Every morning and every evening the priests in the temple in Jerusalem would give a burnt offering. It was called *the continual burnt offering*. It had to fulfill certain requirements:

- A. The first distinction of the burnt offering, and an important one, was that it was always a male without blemish. They had three choices as to the kind of animal, Verse 3:

**"If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it at the door of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD; he shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall present the blood, and throw the blood round about against the altar that is at the door of the tent of meeting." {Lev 1:3-5 RSV}**

If you were rich enough you brought a bull. But if you could not afford a bull or if you did not have a herd of cattle but only a flock of sheep or goats then another provision was made; Verse 10:

**"If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall offer a male without blemish; and he shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw its blood against the altar round about." {Lev 1:10-11 RSV}**

(Their every act was significant in terms of the coming and the work of Jesus Christ. We will see more of that as we go along.)

Finally, if you were very poor and had no animals at all you could bring a bird; Verse 14:

**“If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or of young pigeons. And the priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head, and burn it on the altar; and its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar; and he shall take away its crop with the feathers, and cast it beside the altar on the east side, in the place for ashes; he shall tear it by its wings, but shall not divide it asunder. And the priest shall burn it on the altar, upon the wood that is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD.” {Lev 1:14-17 RSV}**

All this sounds very bloody and gory, doesn't it? But God is saying something very important through all this. He is indicating by these three sources of sacrificial animals that this is a provision made for everyone. Even the poorest can offer something as a burnt offering.

You remember in the New Testament that when Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus up to the temple to be circumcised on the eighth day they gave a burnt offering. They were so poor that all they had to offer was a pair of turtledoves. So that is what they offered for him.

There were certain other things that were important about this burnt offering. The reason why it always had to be a male was because in the Scriptures a male always stands for leadership, initiative, dominion. Females, in Scripture, always signify support, following, response. There were certain offerings for which a female was specified. These were not simply matters left to their own discretion. They were specifically told what to do because this would teach them the truth they needed to learn. So for the burnt offering they had to bring a male without blemish or disfigurement. That was a recognition of the fact that in this most basic of all offerings God was dealing with man as a king, as a sovereign.

- Man was made to rule.
- He was never made to be in bondage to anyone.
- He was never made to be a slave.

That is why we are restless when we are enslaved or held in bondage of any sort. We cannot stand it, for something deep within us was made by God to rule.

Remember how David puts it in Psalm 8? He looks up at the stars and asks,

**What is man that thou art mindful of him,  
and the son of man that thou dost care for him? {Psa 8:4 RSV}**

And he answers his own question,

**Thou hast given him dominion over the work of thy hands;  
thou hast put all things under his feet,  
{Psa 8:6 RSV}**

All the fish and other inhabitants of the seas, all the animals and birds, everything is put under the authority of man. That is man as God created him.

And man still feels this. That is why we are not content unless we are running things in this world. No scientist is content to be excluded from an area of knowledge. No explorer can rest if any mountains are left unclimbed. You remember the famous remark of Sir Edmund Hillary, who conquered Mt. Everest. When asked why he did it he said, “Because it was there.” All this is a dim, sometimes subconscious remembrance of the dominion God gave man.

This is symbolized by the selection of the male for this offering. The most basic expression of our life is that we are made to rule, every one of us. We are not made for being dominated, but to dominate.

- B. The second distinctive of the burnt offering, also very important, was that it was to be totally consumed. Nobody ever ate the meat of the burnt offering. Look at Verses 6-9:

**“And he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces; and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the al-**

**tar, and lay wood in order upon the fire; and Aaron's sons the priests shall lay the pieces, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire upon the altar; but its entrails [intestines] and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn the whole on the altar, as a burnt offering, an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD." {Lev 1:6-9 RSV}**

There were three sacrifices that were said to be pleasing odors to God, delights to God. The first of these is this burnt offering. God says that there is something about man which, when he recognizes his right to rule and gives himself wholly to it, is pleasing to God. God is thereby teaching us that man was meant to be his, wholly, totally. The whole man – body, soul, and spirit – is to be the dwelling place of God. Only this enables man to rule, and rule adequately.

This is recognition of the most basic hunger of man. It is a reflection of our need to belong, to be accepted, to be loved, to have an identity, a relationship, a cause to live or die for. Man is forever restless if he does not have this sense of belonging. And we will never find fulfillment in our humanity, in expressing ourselves, until we find it in committing ourselves totally to God. You and I are searching for someone to love us. That is the most primitive and basic hunger of our life. Because, you see, man is not God. We like to think we are, sometimes. We try to act like God. We try to run the universe and have everything revolve around us. You know the poem which goes:

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

But it is a satanic lie that man is master of his fate. God could flick off a few little switches inside your body and you would be gone – right now! And you'd have nothing to say about it. No man runs his own life or controls what happens to himself. Because man is not God. Man was not made to exist by himself. He was made to be possessed, to be owned by another, to belong to someone else.

Now isn't that strange? Here are two great truths, linked together in Scripture, which seem to be contradictory. Man was born to rule, but he was made to be possessed. He was born to be king over all, but he was made to be under the authority of, and to be possessed by, God. And he is very unhappy unless he is possessed by God. These appear to contradict, but they do not at all.

May I suggest that you can see this truth illustrated in yourself, in your family, and everywhere around you. For example, this is why a child desperately wants and needs a family. A baby who does not have a name or an identity is a restless, unhappy person. He needs to belong to a family.

A few years ago a young man came to this church. He was in his late twenties and was in trouble with the law. He was a confidence man, a slick artist. He was a master at conning you into doing something which would work to his financial advantage. But he was in trouble because he had been caught. We tried to help him, and, in the process, I learned his story. It was an amazing story. He had not known anything about his own identity until he was fourteen years of age. But then he had found out that he was the illegitimate son of a girl who had gone to the Philippines with her missionary parents. There she had fallen in love with a young Filipino man and, without benefit of marriage, they had had a baby. Because of the involvement of the family – because of pride, basically, which always results in cruel treatment – the baby was sent back to the United States and put into a foster home. Nothing was told the foster parents as to where

he came from or who he was. He was finally passed along to an orphanage and there he grew up, knowing nothing about himself nor his family background and history. He was given a name which he knew was not his real name, but he didn't know what his real name was. When he was fourteen he was given access to certain funds in connection with his work and one day he embezzled five thousand dollars. He did this for one purpose only. The first thing he did when he got the money was to hire an agency to trace his family background and to find out who he was and where he had come from. He spent the entire five thousand dollars for that purpose. And he found out. But he had been so disturbed that he could not rest (he was even willing to risk prison and punishment, and he got them) until he found out who he was and where he belonged.

This is what the burnt offering is telling us. The most basic quest of our life is to belong to someone, to be identified with them, to be loved by someone and to be accepted and possessed and owned by someone else. And nothing is more pitiable and pathetic than someone who feels that no one loves him, that he doesn't belong to anyone, that no one cares for his soul.

- C. A third characteristic of the burnt offering – and this is most important – is that it had to involve a death. Death in these offerings is always a picture of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. So when these Israelites offered this sacrifice they were learning the great truth that only by means of the death of an acceptable substitute can man ever satisfy this great longing to belong to and to be possessed by God.

Of course, this is telling us that only in the recognition of the death of Jesus Christ for you can you ever satisfy that longing. He is the expression of the love of God. So we must give ourselves to God through Christ, acknowledging that he owns us, that we belong to him: “You are not your own; you are bought with a price,” {1 Cor 6:19b-20a RSV}. God does not and will not exploit you and run you like a robot or a slave. He loves you and wants to fulfill you and set you free. But you do belong to him. That is the most basic truth of all.

You can find a certain amount of satisfaction in having a family. You will be very restless if you do not have a family. You can find satisfaction in having a background, an identity. This is what the black community is so anxiously searching for – some sense of their true identity. They cannot stop searching because this is a fundamental urge in their lives. But you will never satisfy it wholly that way. You will find that this cry of your heart, this clamant hunger to be possessed and to belong, can be satisfied only by God in Jesus Christ coming into your life. By the death of Christ that door is open.

This summer my wife and I were down at Forest Home Conference Grounds where I shared the platform with Dr. Henry Brandt who, as many of you know, is a Christian psychologist. I was so interested to hear him talk in his humorous style about the relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children:

He told us that while his wife and he were still courting they said to one another that they wanted to give themselves to each others' happiness. He said, “I'll never forget the night my wife said to me, ‘You know, dear, I want to spend the rest of my life just making you happy!’” He said, “Wasn't that great!? Imagine this beautiful woman dedicating herself for the rest of her life to making me happy! I thought it was tremendous – then we got married.”

The first week of their marriage he said to his wife one evening, “You know, on Thursday nights I've been accustomed to going out with the fellows. So tonight I'm going to go out with them. I'll probably be very late so don't wait up for me.” His wife reacted very strangely. She said, “But, you can't leave me all alone!” He said, “You really won't be alone. There are lots of things you can do, and I'll just be out having a good time.” She said, “You can't do that! You're married now!” And he remembered saying to himself, “What happened to her promise? Here is her first chance to make me happy and she has blown it completely!”

After awhile it began to dawn on him that though there is a lot of joy in marriage, and much satisfaction in belonging to another, it will never fully satisfy that hunger to belong.

He thought he would find his need met in parenthood. And as he held that first little

child in his arms he anticipated with joy that now he would find his sense of identity in another of his own flesh and blood! But he discovered that babies regurgitated, and needed their diapers changed, and made heavy demands upon him at ungodly hours while giving nothing in return. And his need was never met in that way.

This is what the burnt offering is saying. Only through the death of Christ, and only through the relationship with the living God which that death enables can this hunger be stilled, can this basic desire to belong be met. That is what accounts for the sense of joy and relief upon becoming a Christian. Do you remember that? “Now I belong! God is my Father! I’m in a family. I’ll never be alone again! God will never forsake me nor abandon me! I belong to God!”

- D. The fourth and final distinction of the burnt offering is given in Chapter 6, where there are some additional instructions to the priests about how to make these offerings. In Verses 12-13 they were told:

**“The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it, it shall not go out; the priests shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall lay the burnt offering in order upon it, and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out.” {Lev 6:12-13 RSV}**

What is God saying by that? Simply that this is the most basic relationship of your life, that no other need can ever be met until this need is met. Every morning and every evening they were to offer the burnt offering. It would consume the wood and the meat all through the day and all through the night, so that the fire never went out. This was the central and most

basic of the offerings. By it, God is saying that you can never find any other hunger of your life stilled until you have found this one answered, until you have found that you belong to God, that you are his wholly and completely, body, soul, and spirit.

If you want to solve any other problem of life you have to begin there. “I belong to the Father, I am one of his family. I’m a child of God. I know him as my heavenly Father. I have been accepted by him. He loves me.” If you do start there you have a basis upon which all the other relationships of life can all be worked out, for there, you see, this deep and clamant cry of the human heart is met. Jesus Christ meets us in that place.

This is the burnt offering – **the need to belong.**

**Prayer:**

Thank you, our heavenly Father, for this marvelous provision, this graphic way of teaching us through these instructive offerings what is true about ourselves. Each one of us knows that this is true, knows how restless we are, how unsatisfied, how unhappy we are if we do not have a full sense of identity. But thank you, Father, that you have made provision for this most basic of all needs to be met in Jesus Christ our Lord, who died for us that we might have it. Teach us then to rejoice in our relationship with you and to understand that it lies at the base of everything. May we never forsake it or turn away from it but rejoice forever in this relationship which can never be broken. We will never be abandoned again, never be forsaken, never be lost, never again have no identity. We belong to you, O God, through Jesus Christ. We thank you in his name, Amen.

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## The Need to Respond

by Ray C. Stedman

In the book of Leviticus this morning we will continue our study of the five offerings, which we began last week.

When I say five offerings I don't want anyone to panic because, by offerings, I mean not collections, but the sacrifices of the Jewish faith as set forth in Leviticus.

Many of you may think that these sacrifices, which ceased long ago, are simply relics of a bygone day and that they have no meaning at all for us today. But that is not true. These are symbols, accurately designed and detailed by God to teach men what we need to know – the truth about ourselves and also about our relationship with God and with each other. There is much of great value to us that we can learn from these Old Testament sacrifices, all of which, of course, found their fulfillment in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, in his life and in his death. Therefore as we study them we will relate them to Christ.

Last week, in the first chapter of Leviticus, we studied the first offering – the burnt offering. You remember that this reflects the most basic need of humanity: the need to belong, the need for identity, the need to be accepted, to be welcomed and loved. This is fundamental in our human nature. Psychologists everywhere, though they may differ in many of their opinions about how to deal with men,

always start here. They all recognize this fundamental need to be loved which is evident all around us.

As we saw last week, this need can partially be met by your family and your friends. Anyone who finds acceptance in his family or by his friends finds a sense of security in that, a sense of identity that is very, very important. But what we must understand, and what this burnt offering teaches us, is that there is no possibility that you will ever find that clamant cry within you fully satisfied unless you find it in the death of Christ. Unless through Jesus Christ you belong to God, belong to his family, you will never find that need really met. There will be a deep, restless, longing hunger in your heart. But all Christians can testify that when they came to Christ the thing which produced the joy of that moment was that they recognized that they belonged to God. They were his children forever. A relationship had begun which could never be broken and they were one with the Father in his family. That is what the burnt offering sets before us.

Now we come to the “cereal” offering, as it is called in the Revised Standard Version. Many versions call it the “meal” offering. In the King James Version it is called the “meat” offering because *meat* was the old English word for “food,” or

“meal.” But there is no meat in it at all. In fact this is the only one of the offerings that is bloodless. In all the others animals had to die but in this one no blood was shed.

It could be offered in any of three forms. In Verses 1 through 3 of the second chapter of Leviticus we find that the first form was that of simple, fine flour. We read,

**“When any one brings a cereal offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour; he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense on it, and bring it to Aaron’s sons the priests. And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense; and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion upon the altar, an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD. And what is left of the cereal offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the LORD.” {Lev 2:1-3 RSV}**

You can see that this was intended to be food for the priests. Their meat and cereal came from these offerings. In Verse 4 there is a second form in which the offering could be presented:

**“When you bring a cereal offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil.” {Lev 2:4 RSV}**

They could bring loaves or cakes of unleavened bread which, as subsequent verses specify, could be either baked, grilled, or pan fried. The third form is found in Verse 14:

**“If you offer a cereal offering of first fruits to the LORD, you shall offer for the cereal offering of your first fruits crushed new grain from fresh ears parched with fire.” {Lev 2:14 RSV}**

They could take freshly harvested wheat and shake the grain out by hand and crush it. That was then acceptable as a cereal offering.

It is obvious that the essence of this offering was that it was bread. It was food, the staff of life. This theme is the key to the cereal offering. All through the Old Testament you find people offering meal offerings, often in the form of three loaves of

bread. And in the tabernacle there was the showbread.

The reason for all this becomes apparent when you remember that in the New Testament, after the great miracle when he took loaves and fishes and fed five thousand people, Jesus stood before the people and said, “I am the bread of life. I am the living bread which comes down from heaven. He who eats me shall live by means of me,” {cf, John 6:33-35). He was indicating that he himself is to be our food and that we are to feed upon all of his character and his life.

This gives us a clue to what the meal offering is depicting. It is a description of humanity as God intended it to be. This was seen in its perfect form only in Jesus Christ – the perfect, unsullied, spotless, God-pleasing humanity of the Lord Jesus. It bears relationship to us only if we as Christians are drawing from, feeding upon, the humanity of Jesus which is given to us.

I want to stop for just a minute here and make something clear. I find that everywhere I go people have the idea that the gospel, the good news, is that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross in order that you might go to heaven when you die. That is a form of the gospel and is a part of it. Unfortunately that is all of it which you hear in many places. But that is not the whole gospel by any means. If that is all you think the good news is then you have believed only a part of the gospel. The *really* good news is that Jesus Christ died *for* you in order that he might live *in* you. It is his living in you *now* which is the exciting part of Christianity. You see, if you are not linked with his humanity and all that he is, if his perfect humanity is not available to you, then you are not enjoying the fullness of the Christian life or experience, because that is what it is all about.

This is what the meal offering is looking toward. Eventually it is looking toward us – we who can say with Paul, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,” {Gal 2:20a KJV}. His perfect humanity is available to me. All the fullness of his life, the fineness of his character, the balanced quality of his humanity is available to me. And as I draw upon it by faith, as I expect him to link himself with me and to be part of me as I work and live, I shall find that I am privileged to present that perfect humanity back to God to be used as he wants. That is the

fullness of the gospel and that is what the meal offering is all about.

Do you see how beautifully the fine flour expresses that? If you take a pinch of fine flour and run it through your fingers you can't feel any coarseness, any granularity, any roughness there at all. There are no uneven, jagged corners nor anything sharp. It is smooth. It is consistent, no matter where you sample it. It is balanced, even. That is why fine flour is such an apt picture of the humanity of Jesus – and of man, as God intended man to be. If we had a meal offering to symbolize our natural humanity it would be of something like rough-cut oatmeal, with a lot of chips of husk and straw and other chaff. But the humanity as God made us to be, and as he intends us to be, and which is available to us in Christ, is a balanced life.

All of us keep trying to balance our lives and we have a great struggle in doing so. We push to one extreme and then find we have gone too far. So we have to compensate in another direction. It is a zigzag, seesaw pattern. We never seem to be able to strike the happy medium. Well, that is because we are not drawing upon the life which is already balanced. You do not have to balance the life of Jesus. It is already a balanced life. And if you draw upon it, if you expect him to live in you, what you do will be balanced. Because he is the meal offering with its perfection of fine flour.

As you move through this passage you note that there are three things which always had to be included in the meal offering and two things which never could be included. It is important to heed these.

The **three things always included** were oil, frankincense, and salt. Every mention of the meal offering in any form includes oil and frankincense:

- The oil was used in two ways: it was mingled with the fine flour and it was also poured on top of it. That is very instructive, as we will see in a moment.
- The frankincense was perfume, the *Chanel #5* of those days. It was a delightful fragrance.
- The use of salt is specified in Verse 13:

**“You shall season all your cereal offerings with salt; you shall not let the salt**

**of the covenant with your God be lacking from your cereal offering; with all you offerings you shall offer salt.”**  
{Lev 2:13 RSV}

Again we have these marvelous visual aids which God uses to teach us what he wants in our lives. In our new humanity which we have received in Christ he wants three elements clearly present.

1. The first is *oil*, which is a type, or picture, of the Holy Spirit. All through the Scriptures you find that it symbolizes the Spirit of God. With this offering the oil is to be used in two ways:
  - a) It is, first of all, to mingle with our humanity. This speaks of the indwelling Spirit. When you became a Christian by faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God was shed abroad in your heart. He came in to live in you and he is part of you. He is mingled with your humanity. That is also called *the baptism of the Holy Spirit*. It has nothing to do with speaking in tongues; it means that, by the Spirit, “we are all baptized into one body,” as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 12 {1 Cor 12:13a RSV}.
  - b) But then also, when you do something, when you minister, you need to have the Spirit anointing you, empowering you. You need to take fresh hold of him, so that you speak or act or think or write or work with power. That is the pouring of the Spirit upon you: “We are all made to drink of one Spirit,” {1 Cor 12:13b RSV}.Notice that this was true of Jesus Christ in his own life. He was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. But then there came the day when, in the baptism at the river Jordan, the Spirit of God anointed him for his ministry. This is to be true of us as well.
2. The second element which is to be in our new humanity is *frankincense*. The frankincense was all offered to God. Verse 2 says, “And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil with all of its frankincense; and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion ... a pleasing odor to the LORD.” In other words,

this is primarily something which God wants, something which he sees. Therefore it is not something outward, but something inward. What it is, I think, is made clear by various passages in Scripture which speak of the things that delight God. What would you think is something about your life which delights God, which pleases him?

Well, let's look together at some passages:

Read Psalm 69, Verses 30-31. The Psalmist says,

**I will praise the name of God with a song;  
I will magnify him with thanksgiving.  
This will please the LORD more than an ox  
or a bull with horns and hoofs. {Psa 69:30-31 RSV}**

So don't bother to bring the ox or the bull; just bring a thankful, cheerful, praising heart. That will please the Lord. You remember what the Apostle Paul says about giving in Second Corinthians 9: "God loves a cheerful giver," {2 Cor 9:7 RSV}. He wants you to be hilarious in your giving and to say, "What a joy to be able to give!" God loves a cheerful giver, a thankful, cheerful, ungrudging heart.

Or read Hebrews 13:15-16:

**Through him [i.e., Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. {Heb 13:15-16 RSV}**

In other words, the frankincense of our lives is to be a thankful, cheerful, willing, voluntary, obedient heart. That is what God likes. That delights him. And as we present our redeemed humanity to him this is what he wants to see.

3. The third element is *salt*, which, as you know, is a preservative.

Some of us who are older remember the days before we had refrigeration. Of course, we had ice boxes back then and we could keep a few things by bringing in ice every couple of

days and filling the ice chest. I remember how the ice truck used to drive up and down the street and sell ice for that purpose. But that was cumbersome. So we preserved a lot of meat by putting salt on it. We had salt pork, salt ham, salt bacon, etc. Salt is a good preservative.

You remember that Jesus said to his disciples on one occasion, "You are the salt of the earth," {Matt 5:13a RSV}. That is, "You Christians are intended to be the thing which keeps society from getting rotten, from degenerating, from becoming corrupt and smelling." And he said, "You are the light of the world," {Matt 5:14a RSV}. Light, of course, is truth revealed. And salt is truth obeyed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

That is what is wrong with the world today. The church has had the truth, and it has been talking great words but it has not been obeying them. And until Christians begin to obey what God has said – these great words of truth and love and mercy and peace and the bearing of one another's burdens – there is no preservative in society. Society gets rotten. But when the church begins, as it is doing now, to come back and to act upon what it says – to love instead of cutting people off, to reach out toward them – then it is salt, a preservative.

"With all your offerings," God said, "you shall offer salt."

Then there are **two things which were excluded** from the offering, and both are found in Verse 11:

**"No cereal offering which you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven; for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as an offering by fire to the LORD." {Lev 2:11 RSV}**

You housewives know what leaven is. It is yeast. When you have made bread you have taken yeast, or leaven, and put it in the dough. Why? Because it has the power to expand, to puff up. Thus leaven is a fitting illustration or symbol of that in our human life which puffs us up. What is that? Pride.

I remember that a doctor told me years ago, "You know, human beings are funny. When you

pat them on the back, their head swells up.” And there are amazing forms of pride. Sometimes we disguise it as though it were really humility. I heard of a church which gave its pastor a medal for humility – but they took it away because he wore it! Every one of us knows that there is something about our hearts which is easily susceptible to being puffed up.

Paul said to the Corinthians, “Love builds up, but knowledge [i.e., pride in your knowledge] puffs up,” {cf, 1 Cor 8:1 RSV}. This is so true. You see, what God is saying is, “When you come to offer your humanity to me, don’t have any ego in it. Don’t be doing this for your own glory. Don’t be trying to derive from this a certain amount of satisfaction or credit for yourself.” “No flesh,” he says, “shall glory in my presence.”

There must be no leaven in the offering.

Second, there shall be no honey.

“Well,” you say, “what’s wrong with honey?”

There is nothing wrong with honey, in many ways. Remember that the Israelites were called to live in a land flowing with milk and honey. God didn’t say that there was anything evil about honey, so don’t go home and throw your honey out, or your leaven, either. Just keep what they symbolize out of your life. That is the point.

But again this is a fitting symbol. Honey, as many of you know, is natural sweetness. Sugar is refined sweetness. Sugar cane or sugar beets are processed in a way that brings out the sweetness. But you don’t need to refine honey; it is natural sweetness. There are some people, rare among us I admit, who are naturally sweet. Some people have an even temper and disposition. They do not get upset very easily. They are easy to live with. Even though they may not be Christians at all they still have a natural sweetness. But God says, “Don’t bring that to me because it won’t work.” The only sweetness he accepts is the sweetness of the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ working in you. He does not want your natural attributes. Not that it is not nice for others to have you around if you are naturally sweet, but that will not do anything for you in God’s sight.

He refuses the honey.

There is **one other thing to note** about the meal offering which is most important. If you read through the book of Leviticus and other texts in the Old Testament you find that the children of Israel

never offered a meal offering by itself. It was always accompanied by an animal sacrifice. These meal offerings were designed to go with one of the animal sacrifices, and most often with the burnt offering. That is why it is put right next to the burnt offering in the order of the sacrifices. There is the burnt offering, then the meal offering, then the peace offering. The meal offering is always offered in connection with the burnt offering.

That is very instructive, because it is telling us something significant about the meaning of this meal offering. The burnt offering, remember, was the need to be loved – the need to be accepted and to belong. But if God reaches out to you and says, “You are mine,” then that lays a demand upon you, doesn’t it? You need to do something. You need to say something back to God. You need to respond to his love. You need to open up your life toward him. He has reached out toward you; you need to reach back toward him. That is what the meal offering is all about. It exemplifies this basic, inherent quality of humanity: It cannot develop, it can never go anywhere, it can never fulfill itself until it is ready to respond to the love which reaches out to it.

Again, you can see this all around you – in your home, and in your own nature and experience. We are made to respond. Usually we respond in kind to the way we are approached.

If I come to you and level my finger at you and say, “Look, you and I have been friends for five years. But I’ve been thinking about that, and there are some things I’d like to take up with you. I want to talk to you about some things I don’t like about our friendship.” What would you do? You would level your finger back at me, and say, “Yes, we have been friends for five years – seems like ten to me. I’ve been thinking about our relationship too, and I’ve got a few things I’d like to settle with you.” My hostility would arouse your hostility and we would be at odds just like that!

But if I come to you and say, “You know, I’ve just been thinking about the five years of friendship that we have enjoyed with each other. And the more I thought about it, the more I have begun to appreciate some of the things that you have meant to me, and how you’ve helped me. So I just wanted to tell you about it.” Do you know what you would do? You’d say to yourself, “You know, I’ve always liked this guy, but I never saw so much in him before. This is really an astute observer. He

obviously is a deep and perceptive person!” And you’d begin to thank me, and tell me some things about what my life had meant to you. That is because inherent in our humanity is this quality of response.

Now, sometimes there are factors which hinder it. Sometimes there are barriers of fear and suspicion and hostility and hate and resentment which need to be removed. But the way they can be removed is to respond to love. As long as there is no response, there can be no progress in the love. You can’t go any further.

The one who loves and reaches out toward you can never go any further than that initial act as long as you do not respond. As long as you remain cold, and frozen, and indifferent, and turn your back, there is no possibility of its going any further. Even God cannot give you any more until you say “Yes” to what he has already offered you.

This is why you read in Hebrews 4:2 that when the good news reached the people of Israel, “the message that they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith” {Heb 4:2b RSV}. That is, they did not do anything in return, they did not respond to the Word when it came to them. This is why Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians cries out to them with such pleading eloquence:

**Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return – I speak as to children – widen your hearts also. {2 Cor 6:11-13 RSV}**

He says, “There is nothing limiting us. We love you and want to help you, to reach you. I want to minister to you, but you are not responding. You won’t say anything back. You won’t open your heart. You won’t widen your life.” And so he pleads with them as a father. “I speak to you as children,” he says. “Let me in – widen your hearts also.”

This is why God is often represented in the Scriptures as pleading with men. “Come, let us reason together, says the Lord,” {cf, Isa 1:18}. “Come unto me,” says the Lord Jesus, “and I will give you rest,” {cf, Matt 11:28 KJV}. “Turn.” “Repent.” “Come back.” God is forever pleading with men to do something about the love with which he has reached out toward us.

In Hebrews 11:6 the most basic approach to God is described in this way, “whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him,” {cf, Heb 11:6b}. God has been seeking us, and he says, “Now it is time for you to begin to seek me. I’ve been reaching out to you. Now you reach back to me.” Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. This is the law of response in human nature. This is why John says, “We love, because he has first loved us,” {1 Jn 4:19 RSV}.

This is why the meal offering is the second of the offerings. In the burnt offering you have God reaching out and saying, “You’re mine. I want you.” But in the meal offering you must say in response, “Yes, Lord, I’m yours. I give myself to you.” This is what God is after. Love creates the possibility of response. But if that response is refused then nothing can happen until, at last, the heart begins to respond.

This is why many Christians never seem to grow beyond a certain point with God. At a certain point you stop saying “Yes” to his love. There is an area you don’t want to give up, that you want to protect for yourself. There is an area you want to be yours and not his. At that point you are saying “No” to the love reaching out from God to bless you, and to open you up like a flower before the sun, and fill your life with fragrance and devotion. As long as you say “No” at that point, nothing can happen.

This is why God, again and again through our lives, calls us to times of crisis, times of decision, times when we recognize that we are shutting ourselves away from the grace and love he wants to give us. And we have to come to him and say,

“Lord, here I am. Here is my redeemed humanity, with its oil and its frankincense and its salt, but with no leaven and no honey. I want to be your man, your woman, your boy, your girl, so that today you can express all that you are through me. I give myself to you. Here I am, Lord. Let’s walk together this day.”

When that happens you have offered the meal offering unto the Father, just as the Son of God, in the beauty of his life, constantly offered his humanity – through the Holy Spirit and without spot or blemish – unto God.

## The Need to Respond

Perhaps, in this moment, we can have a time of silent prayer in which you can respond in your heart to God. Is there an area where you have been saying “No”? Well, then start saying “Yes.” If there is an area from which you have been shutting him out, will you now say? –

“Yes, Lord, here I am. I need your love. I need to belong. I need to be identified with you. And as you have reached out to me, I now reach out to you.”

### **Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the love which is everlastingly reaching out toward us, and which never seems to stop. Even

though we’ve said “No” so many times, your love keeps pursuing us. Lord, we thank you for that everlasting quality which never says “No” to us, which never seems to give up but keeps pleading and waiting for that response of our heart. Now may we in this moment respond to you, our Father – respond in grateful appreciation and thanks and love for all you want to do in us. Take us this day, Lord, and be our God, and live through us, so that we might give ourselves again tomorrow and all through the days of this week and for the rest of our lives, and that everything you are, we may be. We ask it in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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## The Need for Peace

by Ray C. Stedman

Please turn again with me to the book of Leviticus.

In Chapter 3 we will study the third of the five great offerings of the people of Israel. It has beautiful power to picture for us truth which affects us deeply in our relationship with Jesus Christ. All these offerings are pictures of aspects of the sacrifice of Jesus. If you want to understand the work of the cross, I urge you to give deep and thoughtful consideration to the offerings in this book.

The peace offering, which we will consider this morning, is a picture of another of the basic and fundamental needs of human beings. We all need peace. The two offerings we have previously studied also describe elementary needs of our own humanity:

- The first was the burnt offering which, you remember, pictures for us the need to belong, the need to be loved, the need to be possessed by someone. It was the most frequently offered of all the offerings because it is the most basic of all. No human life is possible without some fulfillment of that need.
- Next came the meal offering, which represents the need to respond to love, the need to open up, to love in return. If someone is loving you but you do not love back then that relationship can go nowhere. You can be in the midst of people who love you, but if your heart does not respond then you are as far separated from love as though you were on a distant planet. Their love cannot reach you unless you reach out in

return. These basic truths are taught here in these great offerings.

- Now we come to the peace offering, and this occurs in the right order.
  - The burnt offering, testifying of the need to be loved, comes first.
  - Then comes the need for response.
  - And when you respond to love, joy is born. That is what joy consists of.

That is why we have joy when we get together as a family on holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving. It is because we are in the midst of those who love us and whom we love. Then the next basic human need is for peace. It is no accident that, in the fifth chapter of Galatians {Gal 5:22}, where the fruit of the Spirit is listed for us, the order of the first three elements of that fruit is: love, joy, peace. That is no accident at all. That was planned by the God who designed human life. That is why these Old Testament offerings are just as eloquent in their expression of human need as the New Testament revelation is. This is the evidence, above all, which convinces me that the Bible comes from a more-than-human hand. It embodies this marvelous corroboration, this correlation of truth which stamps it as a divine product.

As they brought these offerings, the Israelites were, in essence, both declaring and learning these truths. Now, obviously, an Israelite could bring an offering in a mechanical and perfunctory way – in much the same way as some people today come to



church. And, if he did so, the offering meant nothing to him. It was merely a ritual he went through and he was neither taught nor blessed by the performance. You can attend church that way – sing the hymns, listen to the message, bow in prayer – all in such a mechanical way that you might just as well have stayed home, and watched television, or gone out and played golf, for all the good it did you.

You see, God wants understanding in these observances. And when an Israelite brought a burnt offering thoughtfully he was recognizing the love of God for him, recognizing the fact that he was owned and possessed by God. When he brought a meal offering he was responding with joy to God. He was offering himself, in return, he was opening up his life. The result of that was that his life was greatly enriched. So in the peace offering we are recognizing another basic, fundamental need of the human heart. No proper life is possible without peace.

I am not referring here to the peace of forgiveness. That will come in the next two offerings: the sin and the trespass offerings. It is not peace *with* God; it is *the peace of God* we are talking about here. It is peace not in the sense of hostility ceased but in the sense of emotional stability, of an untroubled heart. That is what we need – a sense of security, of well-being, of confidence that things are under control and that it is all going to work out. That is the kind of peace this offering represents.

Perhaps you remember the story of the artists who were commissioned to paint a picture of peace. One artist depicted peace as an absolutely calm and tranquil sea lying under the moonlight without a ripple on the water. But the one who won the prize pictured a turbulent mountain waterfall, a cataract, with its noisily plunging waters. But half-hidden behind the waterfall, in the midst of all the thunder and tumult, was a bird's nest with a mother bird sitting quietly and serenely on her eggs. That was peace. That is what this offering is all about – peace in the midst of trouble, in the midst of conflict.

This kind of peace is perhaps best known and visible by its absence. We know when we are not at peace. We all have had the sense of tension and pressure, that knot at the back of the head, those butterflies in the stomach which won't leave you, the restlessness so intense you feel that you can't

sit down, that you have got to do something, anything, the inability to get your mind off the subject that is troubling you. No matter what you do it is there, throbbing away, and it keeps coming back again and again. You have a troubled heart, and that is the absence of peace.

We all are familiar with the physical difficulties which can come with such an absence of peace. It is an excellent way to build a good case of ulcers. It can create all kinds of disturbances in the body – tics, nervous twitches, indigestion, stuttering, and various other maladies. Even emotional breakdown and nervous collapse can follow. So it is very evident that we are dealing here with a fundamental need. If you do not think the Bible is practical you have not even begun to understand this Book. It deals with human life as it really is.

There is a story in the New Testament which has always helped me because it is so revelatory of what peace, and the absence of peace, can mean. You remember that homely little incident recorded in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus comes into the home of Martha and Mary as an unexpected guest {Luke 10:38-42}. Martha, like any good housewife, goes out into the kitchen and gets busy trying to get a dinner ready for Jesus. She becomes all distracted and upset. You women know how she feels. She loves him, but since he has arrived unexpectedly she hasn't prepared anything. Nevertheless she tries her best, going through all the resources of her kitchen, to get something special ready for him. You can imagine her in there, can't you? – opening the cupboards and slamming the doors, opening the refrigerator, wondering "What shall I do?" She gets all anxious and troubled. She begins to burn her fingers and spill things. The coffee boils over and everything is a mess. Soon she can take no more. She goes into the living room where Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him quietly. And Martha explodes and blames the whole thing on Jesus. That is characteristic of a troubled heart. She says, "Lord, don't you even care that Mary has left me to serve alone?"

I've always appreciated the fact that Martha at least got it off her chest. She wasn't one of those women who go into frigid silences, with icicles hung all around the room for weeks. It has always seemed to me that she is aptly described by the rhyme that goes,

There's a gladness in her gladness when she's glad,  
And a sadness in her sadness when she's sad.  
But the gladness in her gladness,  
And the sadness in her sadness,  
Are nothing to her madness when she's mad!

This is Martha when she comes into the living room. And think of it! So distracted and upset, so troubled is she that she blames the one she wants to bless.

Do you remember his answer? "Martha, Martha, you are so full of care and troubled about many things. But Mary has chosen the one thing which is needful," {cf, Luke 10:41-42}. What is that? Peace. Mary chose it by listening to One who could set her thoughts aright, could set her mind at ease.

And, for the benefit of anyone who is concerned, in the Greek the account does indicate that Mary had already been out in the kitchen and had done her part, had prepared a simple little repast that was perfectly adequate. But Martha wanted to put on a banquet, and she didn't have what it took. So she was all upset and distracted and anxious about the whole affair. Mary had chosen the one thing needful – peace. And that is what we are talking about in this offering.

As you come to it in Chapter 3, you notice that there are four distinctives about this peace offering which mark it as different from the others we have examined.

The first distinctive is that **the peace offering could be either a male or a female**. Look at Verse 1:

**"If a man's offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD." {Lev 3:1 RSV}**

Or Verse 6:

**"If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish." {Lev 3:6 RSV}**

Verse 12 says that it was also possible to offer a goat. But in any case it could be male or female.

That is significant. God is the one who makes these distinctions and he does it because he is trying to impart truth: The burnt offering could be only a male because it deals with man in his capacity to rule, his purpose for being given dominion over all things. And the one thing absolutely necessary to a man in order that he be able to rule is that he himself be possessed, be loved. You cannot rule without that. That is why a male was absolutely required for a burnt offering.

But here in the peace offering we are not dealing with man in terms of his overall purpose in life, his archetypal relationship. We are dealing now with man in his condition, in his existential relationship, in the way he is. It does not make any difference whether you are a leader or a follower, whether you are in a position of authority or not. You need peace in any case. That is the whole point. Therefore either a male or a female was an adequate expression of this peace offering. You see how important it is to recognize these distinctions.

The second distinctive mark of the peace offering was that **all the fat was to be consumed upon the altar**. Verses 3-5:

**"And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as an offering by fire to the LORD he shall offer the fat covering the entrails [intestines] and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver which he shall take away with the kidneys. Then Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt offering, which is upon the wood on the fire; it is an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD." {Lev 3:3-5 RSV}**

Similar provisions for the offering of lambs and goats are contained in Verses 9-11 and 14-15. Look also at Verses 16-17:

**"And the priest shall burn them on the altar as food offered by fire for a pleasing odor. All fat is the LORD's. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood." {Lev 3:16-17}**

In the seventh chapter that restriction is developed even further.

The striking sentence there, of course, is: “All fat is the LORD’s.” What a comfort that is to some of us! I remember a great bass singer, a Christian man, who was very heavy. He used to remind people that all the fat belonged to the Lord.

There is a reason for the fact that there were two things which they were not permitted to eat – “neither fat nor blood.”

We have already seen that the blood is a symbol of the life. This is God’s way of impressing upon the Hebrew people, and upon all of us, that life is sacred to God. Life belongs to God. It is his to control. Man should handle it very delicately and gently, and with great respect. Life is not to be treated lightly. The Hebrews were taught that fact and reminded of it every time they were told that they were not to eat blood.

But now we learn that fat is the Lord’s too. In the Scriptures, fat is everywhere used as a symbol of the richness of life. We think of fat meat as rich meat, and that is exactly what this symbol portrays. The richness of life comes from God and is owned by God. Only he can give it.

This is a great truth that you, as a Christian, or simply as a human being, would do well to understand and accept thoroughly in your life. There is nothing in your life of richness – that which makes life enjoyable and full and delightful – except what has come from God. This is what Paul argues in Romans 2. “The goodness of God,” he says both to believer and unbeliever, “is leading you to repentance,” {cf, Rom 2:4}. God is showering his love and his richness upon the just and the unjust alike in order that he might show us all that what makes life worth living comes only from God. As James puts it, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation nor shadow of turning,” {cf, Jas 1:17}.

Richness belongs to God. And as these Hebrews were told to take this fat and carefully remove it, especially the interior fat that was on the inner organs of the body, they were being taught that all the inner richness of life – everything which makes a person strong and delighted within – is from God, belongs to him, comes only from him.

There is a **third characteristic** of the peace offering which is extremely important. We find it over in the law of the peace offering in Chapter 7, Verses 28-34:

**The LORD said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, He that offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the LORD shall bring his offering to the LORD; from the sacrifice of his peace offerings he shall bring with his own hands the offerings by fire to the LORD; he shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the LORD. The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons. And the right thigh you shall give to the priest as an offering from the sacrifice of your peace offerings; he among the sons of Aaron who offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion. For the breast that is waved and the thigh that is offered I have taken from the people of Israel, out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel.” {Lev 7:28-34 RSV}**

Only two portions of the peace offering animal were to be eaten – the breast and the right thigh. But, before they were eaten, they were offered, in a sense, to the LORD. They were not burned upon the altar. That would have ruined them as food for the priests. They were merely waved up and down before the LORD. The thigh, perhaps heavier than the breast, was heaved up and down before the LORD, rather than waved. In either case this was a symbolic gesture that these portions were related to God. Then the priests were to feed on them.

Now, right in that little requirement is hidden the secret of how to have peace in the midst of trouble, how to have an untroubled heart even though the conditions around you are very troublesome, how to get rid of the knots in your stomach, the tension in the back of your mind, all your restlessness, and how to be at peace. As we have already noticed, every one of these offerings involved the death of an animal. Even the meal offering was always offered in conjunction with the burnt offering. And, in the Old Testament, the animal’s death was always a picture of the death of Christ. He was the fulfillment of the peace offering, and he died in order that his life may be ours. And the two aspects of his life that we are to reckon upon, to feed upon, are represented by the breast and the thigh.

In Scripture, the breast is always a symbol of affection and love. It is the seat of our emotions. And the thigh is always a symbol of power and strength. It is where the strength of our physical bodies is centered. So we have, here, a beautiful picture of the secret of peace in the midst of trouble. It is dependence upon the affection and the strength of Jesus Christ to solve our problems in his own way and time.

You need both those elements:

- First, love, to steady you, to remind you that he is concerned about you. He knows the problem you are going through. He has been through it himself. He understands exactly how you feel. And he is not abandoning you. He loves you and he will be with you in it.
- And then, power, to remind you that he is able to work it out in his own way and time. “All power in heaven and on earth,” he says, “is committed unto me,” {cf, Matt 28:18}. As you begin to accept that fact, and to rest upon it, to reckon it true, to count upon it, you will find peace beginning to steal into your heart in the midst of your troubled circumstance. That is the way it works.

Our problem is that we are always trying to second-guess God. Aren't we?

We ask him for things, and usually they are things he has promised to give us. There are relationships we want changed, people we want reached, circumstances which need to be altered. The Word of God says that we can ask for such things and so it is perfectly all right for us to pray that way. But then what do we do?

Well, if you are like me, you start figuring out how God is going to do it. We say, “Well now, let's see. If he will simply change that person, and then if he'll just alter this situation, as a result of that then such and such would take place...” And soon we say, “Ah, I see now how he can do it. God, with his power, can work this all out.” Before we realize what has happened we have begun to anticipate that this is the way he is going to do it!

And we feel an immediate sense of relief. “Ah yes, now I see how God is going to work it out.” At first perhaps events do seem to be moving in that direction. We may have guessed the first step correctly. But then suddenly everything falls apart.

The whole situation blows up. Everything we thought would happen doesn't happen. And everything we feared would happen happens. We say, “What's gone wrong? Lord, you've failed me!”

With shattering dismay comes the realization that it is not working out as we thought it would. So we get mad at God. We say, “Prayer doesn't work. God doesn't care. He's not faithful!”

I have said this; you have said it; I hear this over and over. But what is the problem?

Why, we have forgotten that God has promised that he loves us, and that he has power to work it out his own way. He tells us very plainly: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” {Isa 55:8 RSV}. “The way you think it is going to work out is not the way I am going to work it out. But if you will trust me I'll work it out.” And if we will accept that fact, if we feed, you see, upon the breast and the thigh, upon the affections and the power of Jesus Christ, he will work it out – in his own way and time. And that is where peace comes from.

The New Testament teaches this very plainly. Listen to these words from John 14:25-27. Jesus said,

**“These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit [what needs to be done is going to be done by the Holy Spirit], whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you [I bequeath it to you. I am going away, and I leave as your heritage, your inheritance: my peace. You can have it; it is yours]; not as the world gives do I give to you.” {John 14:25-27a RSV}**

That last statement is very important to notice. How does the world give peace? You know how. When a worldlying is disturbed and upset and troubled he tries to do one of three things. He first tries to change the circumstances, because his peace comes from peaceful circumstances. He can be at peace only when everything is peaceful around him. And so he tries desperately to change the circumstances. But they cannot always be changed. So if he cannot change them he tries to forget them and run away – go on vacation, go home to mother, take a drug, or get drunk. That forgetfulness is the

world's way of finding a degree of peace. If he cannot do that then the third thing he tries is to blame his difficulty on somebody else. It is everybody's fault but his. Thus the worldling seeks peace, but he never finds it that way. So Jesus says, "I'm not going to give you peace that way. Not as the world gives, give I unto you."

How does he give it, then? He gives it from within. He gives it as you feed upon his affection and his power. As you reckon his promises to be true and turn the job over to him and leave it in his hands, then you will have peace.

In Ephesians 2:13-14, the Apostle Paul says,

**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ [the blood of Christ – his death]. For he is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, {Eph 2:13-14 RSV}**

That is how peace is brought. Christ is peace. And if we are ready to trust him and to believe what he says – that he loves us and has the power to do something about it, that is able to do it and is doing it – then peace will be our portion.

In that well-known passage in Philippians 4:6-7 Paul says,

**Have no anxiety about anything [that is not just an invitation; it is a command], but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving [that is the peace offering] let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding [you won't be able to explain how it got there – the circumstances haven't changed, you're not forgetting the problem, nor trying to blame it on everybody else] will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." {Phil 4:6-7 RSV}**

Paul continues in Verse 9:

**What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you. {Phil 4:9 RSV}**

This past week while I was in Phoenix a well dressed man and his wife came up to me at the end of the meeting on Wednesday night. He gripped my hand very hard and said, "Sir, you'll never know what your coming to Phoenix has meant to

me." I said, "Why? What do you mean?" He said, "I'm not a member of this church [where the meetings were held]. I just heard about these meetings. But I came last night and tonight. Last night when I came in I was so troubled – my wife knows that I was on the verge of a collapse. I was gripped with fear and anxiety, and I was so upset and disturbed that I couldn't eat or sleep. But as I listened to you I heard what Jesus Christ is willing to be to me. I have put the problem in his hands and now I'm at peace. I just want to thank you for what you said. It has brought peace to my heart."

That has been my own experience in these past few months. I have been going through a time of deep and difficult trouble. The pressures at times have been so intense as to drain all natural strength. At those times it has only been the reassurance of the realization that the God who loves me – a God of infinite power – is at work in the situation which has brought peace.

There is one final characteristic of the peace offering. It is found in Chapter 7 of Leviticus again, Verses 15-18. Here is a **strange requirement**:

**"And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering; he shall not leave any of it until the morning. But if the sacrifice of his offering is a votive offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and on the morrow what remains of it shall be eaten, but what remains of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burned with fire. If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be credited to him; it shall be an abomination, and he who eats of it shall bear his iniquity." {Lev 7:15-18 RSV}**

Isn't that strange? You could eat the flesh on the day you offered it if it was an offering of thanksgiving for some particular thing. Or if it was just a general expression of your gratitude toward God you could save some of it for the second day. But under no circumstances were you ever to eat of the flesh of that peace offering on the third day. It had to be burned with fire. If you tried to eat any of it, that was an abomination unto God.

Now, what is God saying here? Well, it is a very practical truth. He is saying that there must be no separation between the peace that you feel and the source of that peace, the sacrifice which provided it. You must not separate the two. In other words, you must not depend upon the feelings of peace that are given to you. Don't try to live on those. Once peace is given as a result of trusting the work of Jesus Christ on your behalf don't just say, "Ah, now I feel much better! I think I can go on now, and tomorrow I'll just expect this peace still to be here and I'll reckon on that." Don't shift your dependence from the One who gives peace, to the feeling that is produced.

What a practical warning that is! – because we all tend to do this, don't we? As soon as the load is lifted we think, "Well, everything's fine now. I'll shift back now and go on, on my own." But if you try that, within two days you are right back into the same mess again, with a troubled heart. No, there is only one source from which peace can come. It comes by reckoning upon the wisdom and the love and the affection and the power of a risen Lord who, at work in you, is able to handle your situation and work it out in ways that you can't anticipate or even dream, if you will but put it into his hands. That doesn't mean simply to forget it – you may be part of the solution. God's way of working it out may be to use you. But you don't know

when he may want to use you. Just stand ready and he will let you know. But the responsibility of working it out is no longer yours. It is God's. That is the secret of peace.

### **Prayer:**

We thank you, Father, for these eloquent truths taught in this marvelous way through these Old Testament sacrifices. Help us to take them literally and seriously, because our lives depend on it. Lord, we realize that you are not just kidding us when you talk about these things. You are not playing with your creatures when you teach us how to live. You are imparting truths to us which we had better learn or life itself will take a tragic toll from us. So we pray that you will give us open and responsive hearts and minds, and that we will recognize that in the dying of the Lord Jesus, and in his living again, we have all that it takes to bring us through our troubles, through our upsets and our disturbances no matter what their nature, and that thus we can be at peace. How we need that peace! Thank you for the gift of it, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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## The Need to Confess

by Ray C. Stedman

In the book of Leviticus, the five great offerings specified there set forth for us so clearly and helpfully the basic needs of our humanity, needs which God has built into every one of us, and how these needs can be met – the only way in which they can be met. We come to the fourth of these offerings this morning, the sin offering. Here we come face to face with a question which is evident everywhere in the world, which very few people ever seem to attempt to answer. The question is: Why does man fear and avoid God?

I do not think that I need to produce much evidence to convince you that it is a fact that everywhere man avoids, if he can, the person – and even the thought – of God. Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to interject into a conversation any reference to God? – unless of course you do it in blasphemy, then you can get by without any trouble. But if you try to suggest something nice about God, then a stillness falls upon the group, a restlessness occurs. People do not want to talk about God.

Now, why is that? Why is this such a painful subject to so many?

This past couple of days many of us attended the Creation Science Seminar here. We heard two outstanding and capable scientists speak about the tremendous scientific veracity of the Bible. It was a great time. I enjoyed it thoroughly and learned a lot. I had always thought that I was somewhat current on this subject, but I must confess that I learned a great deal I hadn't known before as Dr. Morris and Dr. Gish talked to us. One of the things that impressed me most was the clear evidence which emerged in their lectures that many scientists scrupulously avoid attributing anything in nature to God. They will do almost anything to avoid having to say that God did something in the natural world. Isn't that strange?

In fact, as these men brought out, there are reputable scientists of good standing who have careful scientific minds but who will actually come to the point of inventing absurdities in order to avoid saying that God did something. They told us about one prominent scientist right here in the Bay Area who obviously has been impressed with the lack of evidence in the fossil record to support satisfactorily Darwin's theory of evolution. And so in order to explain the lack of transitional forms between the major kinds of animals he has actually proposed seriously that, for example, somewhere along the line a reptile laid an egg and a bird was hatched from it. He calls this the "hopeful monster mechanism." This was proposed in all seriousness to the scientific world simply as an attempt to avoid saying that a Creator was involved.

Why is this? Why do men so avoid and fear even the subject of God? – even men who otherwise are honest and reputable, men of integrity. Well, the answer, of course, is that men suffer from a terrible sense of guilt.

You remember that, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve at first were walking in full fellowship with God. There was no fear in their hearts toward God. In the cool of the evening God would come and walk with them, and they were in perfect communion. Then they made the choice to obey the Tempter's voice instead of God's. The first sign of the effect of that disobedience was that they hid from God when he came to walk in the garden. And man has been hiding from God ever since because he has a deep sense of guilt in his life. Guilt always alienates. It always divides and severs a relationship. This is why men everywhere, universally, have this sense of restraint and of fear toward God.

In the sin offering we are coming to the way God deals with that problem. As a part of the in-

introduction I would like to point out again that the order of the offerings is very significant. This fourth offering comes only after the first three, which have dealt, as we have seen, with the basic needs of men for

- love (the burnt offering),
- joy (the meal offering, representing the response to love),
- and peace (the peace offering).

Love, joy, and peace. Those are the basic needs of human life. Without them you cannot function properly as a human being. You know that. You have searched desperately for these things yourself. And as we pointed out last week, it is no accident that in the listing of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, the very first three provisions made by the Spirit of God are love, joy, and peace, in that order.

Only after these does God begin to talk about sin and trespass, the next two offerings.

Here he is dealing with another basic requirement of humanity. We need not only the positive virtues of love, joy, and peace, but, having them, we then need to begin to act as responsible individuals, to deal in a responsible way with life around us. That is what we learn in the guilt and the trespass offerings. We are now called upon to act responsibly toward God, toward life, and toward the world around us – our fellow man.

But again I call your attention to the fact that God does not start talking to us on that theme. It is true that all of these offerings were fulfilled in one act in the life of Jesus – his death on the cross. All of them point to that. From the death of Jesus, as the fulfillment of these offerings, flow to us love, joy, peace, forgiveness – all the blessings of these five offerings. But when we think of the death of Christ we almost invariably think of the sin and the trespass offering. The forgiveness of our sins is what we are concerned about. But that is not where God starts! It is very helpful to see that he is not talking to us about our sins.

That is the way we Christians sometimes do it. We talk to people about becoming Christians and the first thing we say is, “You’re a *sinner*! You need to be *forgiven*!” And sometimes we thunder away with hell-fire and damnation at people in order to get them “under conviction,” under guilt about their sins. It is true that God wants to talk to man about his sin. Man can never solve his prob-

lems until he solves that problem. But that is not where God starts. He starts by talking about love and joy and peace. He provides that first and then he says, “Now let’s get at the heart of the problem which is separating us.”

Isn’t that marvelous?

That is why, in the story Jesus told of the prodigal son {Luke 15:11-32}, when the son comes back from the far country and his father spots him on the horizon, the father runs to meet him with his arms wide open. He flings his arms around his returning son and cries out with joy. And the boy stutters and stammers and tries to speak the words he has been memorizing all the way home: “Father, I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants,” {cf, Luke 15:19}. But the father won’t even wait for that. He starts shouting, “Bring forth the robe, and the ring, and the calf, and let’s make merry!” {cf, Luke 15:22-23}, because, you see, the father recognized him as his son, before he began to deal with him about his problem. The son had to make his confession eventually, but that isn’t where the father started.

This is why, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul cries out, “Because *you are sons*, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” {Gal 4:6 RSV}. Now, we sometimes would like to turn that around. We’d like to say, “Because God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, you are sons.” But that is not the way Scripture puts it. It says that *because you are sons* in Christ, i.e., you have come to God, therefore he gives you love and joy and peace. And on that basis, and after your experience of it, he wants to talk to you about the problem of alienation in your life.

That is our introduction to the sin offering.

Let’s look at it together now, as it is found in Chapter 4 of the book of Leviticus. As we have seen in each of these offerings there is a certain set of distinctive ceremonies, distinctive requirements, for each offering which mark it as different from the rest, and by which it points out with beautiful accuracy some important aspect of the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Since he is the fulfillment of all these offerings, they all point to him. This fact will help us greatly in understanding what Christ is ready to do, and has already done for us, right now.



The first distinctive of the sin offering is that it **provided for both public and private sin**. There were offerings available for those who had sinned as a group, and those who had sinned as individuals. You find this clearly delineated in this chapter. When it was offered for the sin of a group, or a public individual representing a group, then the offering always had to be a male. When it was an individual sin, the animal was a female. Verses 1-3:

**And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, if any one sins unwittingly in any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and he does any one of them, if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer for the sin which he has committed a young bull without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering.” {Lev 4:1-3 RSV}**

And, again, in Verses 13-14:

**“If the whole congregation of Israel commits a sin unwittingly and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done and are guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a young bull for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting;” {Lev 4:13-14 RSV}**

In the case of a ruler or king, the requirement is given in Verses 22-23:

**“When a ruler sins, doing unwittingly any one of all the things which the LORD his God has commanded not to be done, and is guilty, if the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish,” {Lev 4:22-23 RSV}**

But then when the common people sinned as individuals, Verses 27-28:

**“If any one of the common people sins unwittingly in doing any one of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and is guilty, when the sin which he has committed is made known to him he**

**shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed.” {Lev 4:27-28 RSV}**

In Verse 32 another provision is made:

**“If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish,” {Lev 4:32 RSV}**

So once again the distinction is made between the male, as the symbol of the ruler or the dominant one – i.e., man in his right to have dominion over all things, as always symbolized by any functionary, any government official (a priest, a ruler, a king, etc.), or the whole group together – and the female, as the symbol of the common person, the individual acting on his own, who is therefore in a relationship of support, of undergirding or following.

There were also provisions made in the sin offering for people who could not afford large animals like the bull or a goat or lamb. We have these in Chapter 5. They also apply to the trespass offering. Verse 7:

**“But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring, as his guilt offering to the LORD for the sin which he has committed, two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.” {Lev 5:7 RSV}**

Still further provision is made in Verse 11:

**“But if he cannot afford two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he shall bring, as his offering for the sin which he has committed, a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall put no oil upon it and shall put no frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering.” {Lev 5:11a RSV}**

So even the very poorest had a way out of the guilt of their lives. That was God’s provision for them. Even if they could not afford any animal, they could bring a handful of flour. But they were to put no oil on it, because oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit-filled life. Nor were they to put any frankincense on it, because that is the symbol of the heart dedicated, fully yielded, to God. This is a sin offering, and so they could be repre-

sented in it only by the handful of fine flour alone. But provision was made for all alike.

Now notice a second distinction of the sin offering. In several of the verses we have already read you notice that **the sin was said to be unwitting**. That is, an individual had sinned unknowingly. This is the paramount distinction of this sin offering. You see, it is dealing not with acts of deliberate evil, which all of us commit from time to time, but it is dealing with the nature which prompts those acts, and which always takes us by surprise.

Haven't you noticed that? Most of us, if we were asked our private opinion, would have to say that we are pretty nice people. Most of us have a fairly good opinion of ourselves. We acknowledge that we do still have a few minor problems, yes, a few peccadilloes which, if we merely had the proper motivation, could be taken care of with but slight effort on our part. That is true, isn't it?

But every now and then something happens which surprises us, and we act in a way we didn't expect. Some situation catches us unaware and all of a sudden we do the very thing that we never thought we'd do.

Does that ever happen to you? Don't nod your head, you'll give yourself away! It has, hasn't it?

We come to the sudden and shattering realization that there is evil in us deeper than we had realized. That is what the sin offering is talking about – this kind of surprising sin which catches us off guard, this unsuspected depth of evil in us.

I was talking a few weeks ago with a young man who was telling me about his early days as a young bridegroom. He wasn't yet a Christian. He and his wife had a terrible time. They argued and fought constantly and it was a horrible first year. On one occasion, in the midst of this, he lost his temper completely, drew back his fist, and hit her a resounding blow right between her eyes, knocking her to the floor. This appalled him because he had been brought up with the code that no man ever hit a woman, that to do so was the sign of ultimate cowardice. He had always despised anyone who would ever hit a woman. He said that he went out for a walk after this sudden display, walked up and down, and struggled and struggled with it. He had to face the fact that he was that kind of man, that he was the kind of man who, if he got angry enough, would hit a woman and knock her down.

He said that it was the sudden realization of the depth of his depravity which made him turn at last to God and ask for help. And that is when he became a Christian.

Now that is what this offering is talking about – that kind of evil, embedded in us, part of our nature, which takes us by surprise because we may fancy that we had gotten rid of it, or did not even possess it. Many people are troubled by the doctrine of original sin. They laugh at it, ridicule it, because they don't understand that this is what it is talking about – the terrible capacity within us to act suddenly in a way which we never realized was possible, the fact that given the right circumstances some evil in us will come welling up and take us all by surprise. It is there. No matter how much we might wish to talk ourselves out of it, it is there!

Dostoevski, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, tells a fable about a very wicked woman who died. The devils took her to hell and threw her into the lake of fire. Her guardian angel was very puzzled as to how he might do something to help her. So he thought through her whole life to see if he could find at least one good thing that she had done which he might present before God. Finally he went to God and said, "Once a beggar came by when she was weeding her garden, and she pulled an onion out and gave it to him to eat." God said to the angel, "All right, then you go down and get that onion and hold it out to her in the lake of fire. Tell her to take hold of it, and if you can pull her out with that onion she can come to Paradise." So the angel took the onion, went down to the lake of fire, and held it out to the woman. She grabbed hold and he began to pull. He pulled and pulled and, sure enough, he began to pull her right up out of the lake. She was almost completely free when some other sinners around her, seeing that she was about to escape, grabbed hold of her ankles so as to be pulled out with her. At first the onion held, and they too began to be pulled out. But the woman became very angry and cried, "This is my onion, and you're not going to go out with me!" And, as she kicked them loose, the onion broke and she fell back in and she is burning there to this day.

That is a graphic illustration of the very thing to which this offering is addressed. Even in moments of triumph there is that taint, that evil, in every human heart. That is what the sin offering is dealing with.

The third element of distinction about the sin offering is most remarkable. It concerns **what was done with the blood.**

Remember that, in the previous offerings, just as in the sin offering, blood had to be shed, a death had to occur, but all the blood of the animal was poured out at the foot of the altar. But something unusual was always done with the blood of the sin offering, Chapter 4, Verses 4-7:

**“He shall bring the bull to the door of the tent of meeting before the LORD, and lay his hand on the head of the bull, and kill the bull before the LORD. And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it to the tent of meeting; and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD which is in the tent of meeting, and the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering which is at the door of the tent of meeting.” {Lev 4:4-7 RSV}**

What a strange requirement! The blood of the sin offering had to be sprinkled seven times before the LORD and, in the case of the offering for the anointed priest here, had to be put on the horns of the altar of incense which stood in the holy place right in front of the veil which guarded the holy of holies, i.e., right before the presence of the LORD. Now the same thing was required if the whole congregation sinned, as specified in Verses 15-18. But in the cases of the offerings for a ruler or for an individual the blood was put on the horns of an altar, but in these instances on the altar of the burnt offering, which was in the outer court. Verse 25:

**“Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering [not of fragrant incense], and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering.” {Lev 4:25 RSV}**

The same in Verse 30:

**“And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the**

**rest of its blood at the base of the altar.” {Lev 4:30 RSV}**

So there was a difference in the requirement, depending upon the importance of whoever had sinned. If it was an extremely important individual, such as the anointed priest, or if it was the whole congregation, the blood actually had to be put on the altar right in the very presence of God. But if it was a ruler or an individual it was put on the altar a bit further removed – in the outer court where the offerings were usually burned.

What is the significance of this? Well, it is obvious that a special emphasis is being placed upon the blood. It is to be put in a visible place, and in a place which is obviously connected with God. It is to be recognized openly as being on the horns of the altar before the LORD. And the individual for whom the offering is being made is to be able to see the blood there. That is the point. In other words, there is to be an understanding on the part of the one who sinned that this blood has now covered his sin, forgiven it, and before God it is acknowledged to be forgiven. And when he understands that, then his own conscience can be at rest.

This is very important!

As a pastor I find many people coming to me who have never seen that God accepts the death of Jesus fully on their behalf. They are always troubling themselves about some terrible degree of sin they have committed, and which they think God, for some reason, is not able to forgive. They do not see the blood on the horns of the altar. They have not seen clearly that it has been put there. As a result, they torture themselves endlessly with guilt. But God is trying to make very clear that there is a way to be free of guilt. And once the blood is there on the altar, it provides an absolute way out. There is no guilt left! “He shall be forgiven,” the Scripture says – not only of the sinful acts (that is what the trespass offering is for) but of the guilt of his very nature. A division is made between what we are now and what we once were in Adam. When once we come to Christ a break occurs, and that nature which once was ours is no longer ours. That is why in Romans 7, regarding his sinful actions Paul says, “It is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me,” {Rom 7:20 RSV}. That is what this offering is teaching. It teaches us that this is the only way that man ever has of being free from

his nagging, hidden, inward sense of guilt which alienates him from God.

Men are always trying to find their own ways to be free of guilt. Some try to forget it. Most are trying simply to avoid the whole subject. They don't want to think of their guilt. But you remember how David said he felt when he tried that. These are his words from Psalm 32:

**When I declared not my sin, my body  
wasted away  
through my groaning all day long [It af-  
fected him physically].  
For day and night thy hand was heavy upon  
me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of  
summer. {Psa 32:3-4}**

This is what unacknowledged guilt will do. It will dry up your life, will reduce it to a shallow, superficial level of living in which you have to be caught up endlessly in some diversion in order not to think about your relationship with God. And forgetting will never work either.

Well, psychologists tell us that there are other ways you can do it. You can blame your environment, or can blame your ancestors, or your glands, or something else for your sin. As long as you can put the blame on someone else then you can live with your guilt. Psychiatry and psychology often suggest this as the way to handle guilt. I ran across a quotation on this subject from Dorothy Sayers which is so well put that I want to share it with you. I hope you will pay it careful attention because it is very illuminating as to this supposed "way out." She says:

One of the really surprising things about the present bewilderment of humanity is that the Christian church now finds herself called upon to proclaim the old and hated doctrine of sin as a gospel of cheer and encouragement. The final tendency of the modern philosophies, hailed in their day as a release from the burden of sinfulness, has been to bind man hard and fast in the chains of an iron determinism. The influence of heredity and environment, of glandular makeup and the control exercised by the unconscious, of economic necessity and the mechanics of biological development, have all been invoked to assure man that he is not responsible for his misfortunes and therefore is not to be held guilty. Evil has

been represented as something imposed upon him from without, not made by him from within. The dreadful conclusion follows inevitably that as he is not responsible for evil, he cannot alter it. Even though evolution and progress may offer some hope of alleviation in the future, there is no hope for you and me, here and now.

Then she says,

I well remember how an aunt of mine, brought up in an old-fashioned liberalism, protested angrily against having continuously to call herself "a miserable sinner" when reciting the litany. Today, if we could really be persuaded that we are miserable sinners, that the trouble is not outside us but inside us, and that therefore by the grace of God we can do something to put it right, we should receive that message as the most hopeful and heartening thing that can be imagined.

She is absolutely right! If you don't take this way out then there is no other way to escape the guilt of sin. It keeps coming back, haunting you, living with you, sleeping with you, turning your moments alone into times of fear and loneliness. And there is no way out, no exit from this prison, except by the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the only way out.

I was in a group discussing this the other day, and a young woman said, "I don't like these messages and meetings which always end up making people feel guilty. Isn't that what the gospel is all about, that man is not guilty?" The answer is: "No, that is not what the gospel is all about!" The gospel is that man is guilty, but that there is a way out! God has laid the guilt on Another! Another has bought it, Another has borne it for us. And that Other has perfectly settled it, so that the guilt of our nature is already dealt with before God. And at that place there is a release – and no place else.

There is one final distinctive about the sin offering. It is in **the way the fat and the meat of the offering were handled**. Verses 8-12:

**"And all the fat of the bull of the sin offering he shall take from it, the fat that covers**

**the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver which he shall take away with the kidneys (just as these are taken from the ox of the sacrifice of the peace offerings) and the priest shall burn them upon the altar of burnt offering.” {Lev 4:8-10 RSV}**

All the inward organs and their fat were to be offered to God, just as in the peace offerings. But now listen to the rest:

**“But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung, the whole bull he shall carry forth outside the camp to a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and shall burn it on a fire of wood; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned.” {Lev 4:11-12 RSV}**

The entire rest of the bull was to be taken clear outside the camp, not to the altar of the burnt offering but clear outside the camp, where it was to be burned. You find this again in Verses 20-21:

**“Thus shall he do with the bull: as he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this; and the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. And he shall carry forth the bull outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.” {Lev 4:20-21 RSV}**

So here is another strange requirement. No one was to eat of this offering. In fact when the blood was offered in the holy place then the bull or other offering had to be taken and burned outside the camp.

What is the meaning of that?

Here again we have one of those remarkable symbols which capture life exactly the way it is. For what this requirement is saying to us is that all the inward richness of life, all our inner life as believers in Jesus Christ, is acceptable to God. The fat and the kidneys and the organs within, all the inward life, is God’s and is perfectly acceptable to him. But there is still something wrong with the outer life – the body. It is still unredeemed, you see. It is still subject to sin. It is still to be rejected. That is why in the New Testament we are

told that the body is still the seat of the flesh, and therefore it must die.

Experience confirms this. Christians die just as do non-Christians. Our bodies are yet unredeemed. They are not resurrected. If this were not true, then the moment a person became a Christian not only would his spirit be made alive and his soul saved, but his body would also be transformed, glorified. But, you see, our bodies are still in that unrestored state along with the rest of the world. That is why we have to go outside the camp.

The book of Hebrews makes this very plain to us. It says that this is what happened to Jesus. In Chapter 13, Verse 10, we are told,

**“We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate [he went outside the city of Jerusalem to be crucified and to this day the mount of Calvary is outside the Damascus gate of Jerusalem] in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse [or reproach] with him [not for him]. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come.” {Heb 13:10-14 RSV}**

In other words, though our inner life, our thought life, our inner nature, is now changed and acceptable to God, nevertheless we are still in the world. We still have to live under its reproach, under its rejection, just as Jesus did. We are to bear that reproach with him, recognizing that there is still a part of our life which has not been changed yet. But that is why we look forward to the resurrection as the completion of God’s work for us. How beautifully all this is described in the sin offering. And there outside the camp we are to take the place which Jesus took, that of humility and rejection before the world. This is a blow to our pride. We don’t like it there. But our Lord is there. So the exhortation comes to us that we are to go outside the camp.

The great truth of the sin offering is that God has dealt with our nature of evil. We are no longer linked to it. We are no longer what we once were. Therefore, as persons in Jesus Christ, we stand ba-

sically and fundamentally accepted before God, absolutely favored in his sight.

St. Augustine was a great reprobate before he became a Christian. He lived a rather wild and dissolute life. When he became a Christian things became different. One day he was walking down the street of the city and one of his old girl friends spotted him. She knew who he was and called out his name, "Gustine!" He turned and saw who was calling him. And gathering his robes around him he began to run. She yelled to him, "Gustine! Gustine! Why do you run? It is only I!" And he stopped in his flight long enough to turn around and say, "I run because it is no longer I!"

That is what the sin offering is telling us. In Christ we are no longer what we once were!

**Prayer:**

Thank you, our Father, for this marvelous truth taught in both Old and New Testaments alike, that there is a way out of our guilt, a way out of our alienation, that we no longer need to be far off from you. We need not fear you. You are not a severe God; you are our heavenly Father, loving us, receiving us, and because we are sons, sending forth the Spirit of your Son into our hearts. But help us to be honest, Lord, about our guilt, and not try to avoid it but to know that there is no way out unless we acknowledge it. We must acknowledge it, but then we are free from it. We thank you for that, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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## The Need to Restore

by Ray C. Stedman

This morning we come to the fifth chapter of Leviticus. Here we will deal with the last of the five basic, fundamental human needs represented by the five offerings which God taught the Israelites from the tent of meeting, the tabernacle. The trespass offering, or the *guilt* offering in the Revised Standard Version, is the last of these five. I am sorry that the revisors changed the word to *guilt* because the proper translation really is *trespass*. This offering is the final one of this series of five because it deals with the relationship of man with man, with how to maintain a workable relationship with our neighbor, whether he be a member of our family or any other human being with whom we come in contact. This is the offering which teaches us how to restore harmony to broken human relationships. Therefore we have much to learn from it.

It is instructive for us to note that this comes last in God's order of business. All the other offerings come before this one. They are the need:

- for love, expressed by the burnt offering;
- for joy, expressed by the meal offering;
- for peace, the peace offering; and
- for forgiveness, to remove our sense of guilt before God, expressed in the sin offering.

Finally, after all that, God gets around to talking about how we can get along with each other, with our neighbors and our friends.

You will notice that this is exactly the reverse of the way we humans usually go about it. We are concerned primarily with how to get along with each other. We organize committees and work hard at trying to stop crime, to eliminate war, to correct injustice. We set up governments and struggle to confront these great problems directly and to solve these issues involving broken relationships between human beings. And we try to do this first. We think that if we can get these settled then, other problems will soon disappear. But God never starts there. He reverses the order exactly, and says that the place to start is in your relationship with him. That is why when Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments, he said, first, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength," {cf, Matt 22:37 KJV}. And then, second, "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself," {Matt 22:39 KJV}. You see, it is the first which provides the power to carry out the second. If you reverse the order you lose that. Isn't it strange that we don't understand a simple concept like that? It is amazing how very frequently God must remind us of it.

When I was in Charlotte, North Carolina, on Friday of this past week, I was seated with some twelve thousand other people in a stadium there listening to the President of the United States commending the great work that Billy Graham has done in preaching the gospel in every continent of the world. He was also recalling what it was that had

made this country great. I was struck by certain words that President Nixon used. Calling attention to all the government leaders who were on the platform – the Governor of North Carolina, the senators from North Carolina and from South Carolina, several judges and other local officials – the President said something to this effect: “We government leaders cannot legislate morality. We cannot force people to get along with one another. We cannot create greatness in a nation by law. Greatness must come from religious faith which makes it possible for man to live with man in peace.” That struck me as an amazing admission by a responsible government leader, but it is really nothing more than a declaration of the great truths that are reflected here in this trespass offering. You cannot get along with your neighbor until somehow you have learned to relate to your God. That is the secret of a nation’s success. President Nixon reminded us of past civilizations which, even though they had wealth and military might, nevertheless, crumbled, because they had forgotten that simple relationship.

In this trespass offering we are dealing with that which pertains to the cure and healing of problems caused by acts of evil toward one another. Remember that in the sin offering we were dealing with the basic, fundamental nature from which all these evil acts stem, with the guilt we have before God simply because we are estranged and alienated from him. But here we are dealing with the actual deeds we do toward one another, the injustice, the false treatment, and the injury we bring about.

Not all acts were capable of being forgiven on the basis of the trespass offering. We need to understand that too. You see, all guilt can be forgiven because it is against God. It is something which has arisen because we are members of a lost race. But God in his mercy has provided a way of redemption for us. And so all guilt can be forgiven. But, under the Law, not all trespasses could be forgiven. Back in those days if people committed adultery they were to be stoned to death. For an act of murder the penalty under the Law was death. For an act of sexual perversity the penalty was death. That was because these acts strike against humanity. And man can stand only just so much stress in his social relationships. God can handle

our guilt, but man cannot always handle our trespasses. When the stress becomes too great the only way it can be relieved is by the elimination of the offending individual from society. That is why in the Old Testament you find a severity against individuals and even against whole groups of nations which seems to us to be very harsh. But that is God’s way of removing the terrible tensions which otherwise would tear society apart and of controlling them so that they do not wreck the human family entirely. It is his way of limiting evil. That is why under the Law certain sins were unforgivable.

Now, under grace, this is no longer the case. There is only one unforgivable sin under grace. In our relationship with Jesus Christ there is only one sin which cannot be forgiven, and that is the rejection of the Savior himself. There is no way out if we reject him. That is the unforgivable sin.

As we have seen, each offering had a distinctive character. The unique characteristic of the trespass offering was that it required restitution. There was the need to go back and to straighten up the past, as far as it was possible. It was necessary to right the wrong which had been done, as far as it could be corrected. A broken relationship needs repair, whether something material needs to be restored, or simply whether emotional injury done to another needs to be admitted. That is why it is sometimes necessary in human affairs to go back and clear up problems of the past. This is what God is telling us by means of the trespass offering.

There were five different categories of sin which were covered by this offering:

The first was what we might call “**sins of guilt silence.**” You see it in Verse 1:

**“If any one sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity.” {Lev 5:1 RSV}**

This was sin of omission. If a person saw a crime committed or knew of some similar matter and if it was publicly announced that the authorities needed help in solving the problem, but he kept silence, he was guilty of a trespass. He had injured



society by his withholding of testimony. He had made government difficult. Man cannot be governed when evil is concealed. Every government has recognized this. One of the reasons we have so many problems administering justice today is that people do not want to get involved. So when crime and corruption take place in our society people just hide it. They don't say anything to the authorities and won't even report a crime that is committed right before their eyes. Our law enforcement agencies are throwing up their hands and saying, "Help us, please! How can we help you if you won't help us?" And, way back here in the Old Testament God, declared that this kind of sin injures the whole social structure and makes government impossible.

The second category is found in Verses 2-3:

**"Or if any one touches an unclean thing, whether the carcass of an unclean beast or a carcass of unclean cattle or a carcass of unclean swarming things, and it is hidden from him, and he has become unclean, he shall be guilty. Or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort the uncleanness may be with which one becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it he shall be guilty." {Lev 5:2-3 RSV}**

This introduces the whole matter of **unclean things**, about which we will learn a good deal more as we go on in Leviticus. But for now it will suffice to say that when the Old Testament set aside an object, an animal, an act, or a person as unclean it was recognizing a fundamental law of what today we would call "ecology." If such a law were broken there might not be any immediate effect upon the individual who broke it. But if enough people broke it the cumulative effect would soon be to disturb the delicate balance of nature and ultimately to wreak terrible havoc against the people. That, fundamentally, is what has happened to our society today. If anyone ought to understand this law of uncleanness, it is our generation for we are reaping the results of the fact that people in the past have ignored the basic relationships of nature. We are the generation who has to pay the bill.

Did it ever occur to you that all the things which we now regard as ecologically destructive and threatening to our society were, when they were first introduced, welcomed as benefactions and blessings?

- Some of you are old enough to remember when the automobile first appeared. Do you remember how excited people got about it? What a tremendous advance this was on the horse and buggy! And everyone looked down their noses at anyone who dared to suggest this was not a tremendous sign of progress for the human race. We all wanted to get one. So as soon as we were old enough we bought that first Model T, or Model A, or whatever. But now it is the automobile which is clogging our cities, choking our lungs, and threatening our whole society. We don't know what to do with it. We don't know how to handle it. It has become a bigger problem than we can cope with.
- You ladies remember how wonderful it was when detergents first appeared and you could hang on your line in the back yard clothes whiter than your neighbors. You were the envy of your whole block when all the tattletale gray was gone. But now it is detergents which are killing the fish in our streams, poisoning our lakes, and polluting the oceans. What was first introduced as a blessing has become a terrible curse.
- You remember how farmers and all the rest of us rejoiced when DDT was first developed. All the flies and mosquitoes would be exterminated and life would be much more comfortable. And it was for awhile. But now it is killing the birds and accumulating in our own bodies.

This is the kind of problem which God, in his wisdom, is dealing with in this matter of unclean things. He is teaching man what things will ultimately destroy him, if they are permitted to continue, and thus constitute an offense against society. In these days when we are faced with a desperate ecological crisis we had better take careful notice of what the Bible calls unclean.

There is a third category in Verse 4:

**“Or if any one utters with his lips a rash oath to do evil or to do good, any sort of rash oath that men swear, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it he shall in any of these be guilty.” {Lev 5:4 RSV}**

An oath is a promise or vow to accomplish something. A rash oath is one impossible to perform. It is a vow to do something you can't do. And according to this stipulation, if a man uttered a rash oath – even if it were to do something good, let alone something evil – he was guilty before God. Why? Because in attempting the impossible he was arrogantly pretending to be God and not man. He was forgetting his mortality. He was forgetting that he was the creature and not the Creator. And can you think of anything more destructive in our own day than man's fatuous dream that he can run this universe by himself, that he can control all the forces of nature and make them blend together harmoniously? Nothing has done more to wreck and ruin and wreak havoc among humankind than the vain concept that man is master of his own fate.

For all three of these categories of sin the sacrifice to be offered was the same. Verses 5-6:

**“When a man is guilty in any of these, he shall confess the sin he has committed, and he shall bring his guilt [trespass] offering to the LORD for the sin which he has committed, a female from the flock a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.” {Lev 5:5-6 RSV}**

This was to be a female animal because here we are dealing with man in his weakness, in his submission to the laws of nature. Therefore the female is the appropriate symbol. As we saw last week, in Verses 7-13, provision was made for all economic classes. If a person couldn't afford a lamb he could bring turtledoves. And if he couldn't afford turtledoves he could bring just a handful of fine flour and offer that. So even the poorest had provision for reconciliation and forgiveness of these categories of offenses. But the one inflexible re-

quirement was that the person admit the offense. That meant that he had to see what was wrong. It wasn't that God was demanding repayment. These three kinds of offenses were such that no repayment was possible. But restitution was required in that the person at least had to admit that he was wrong. That was essential to the obtaining of forgiveness in the offering of the animal.

The truth that we are dealing with here is reflected in the New Testament in First John where we are told, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” {cf, 1 Jn 1:8-9}. God insists upon our admitting, our confessing, not because he is trying to humiliate us but because that is necessary in order for us to receive the forgiveness which he has already provided. It isn't that God forgives us at that moment. He has already forgiven us. But we can't accept that forgiveness until we see and understand the truth about what has happened. That is why it is necessary to admit wrong.

This is fundamental to the cure of broken relationships within society. There must come a time when we face what has been wrong and say so – admit that it is wrong. There are lots of ways of thinking you are doing that without really doing it.

- For instance, it does no good for you simply to say, “If I have offended you I want to ask your forgiveness,” because the “if” cancels it out. To say “If I have done something wrong,” is really to say, “You may see it that way, but I don't! If you want to think of it that way then all right, I'm sorry you feel that way, but I don't agree at all.” That is no admission of guilt at all!
- Another common ploy is to say we are sorry. But that doesn't admit that we are wrong! There are times in human relationships when we must hurt people for their own good, and to do so is right. Yet we can be sorry that we have to do it. I'm sure a doctor is sorry that he must hurt his patient when he operates, but nevertheless he does so and never even apologizes for it – much less admit that he is wrong. But what God wants is for us to come to the

place where we say, “Yes, I am wrong. I did it, and it was wrong.”

It is at that point that a relationship is restored. In most broken human relationships it is necessary for both parties to say that. And each one must start with himself, as Jesus said. “First remove the beam that is in your own eye; then you will see clearly how to remove the sliver that is in your brother’s eye,” {cf, Matt 7:5}.

Now two other classes of trespass sins are brought before us. The next is found in Verses 14-17. It consists of **religious offense**. Please pay close attention for this is most instructive.

**The Lord said to Moses, “If any one commits a breach of faith and sins unwittingly in any of the holy things of the LORD, he shall bring as his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram [a male] without blemish out of the flock, valued by you in shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary; it is a guilt [trespass] offering. He shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing, and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest; and the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven.” {Lev 5:14-16 RSV}**

This offense involved something done in “the holy things of the LORD,” and for it the person was to bring a male because the offense here is greater. It was a breach of his relationship to God, within which man is made to rule in dominion over the earth. Thus the male was the appropriate symbol. And yet the offense was committed ignorantly, unwittingly. The person didn’t understand that he was doing anything wrong at the time.

But when he learned about it he was not merely to pass it off and say, “Well, I didn’t understand that at the time.” He was to make restitution and furthermore to add a fifth to it. (Now, that was not a fifth of whiskey; it was a fifth of the monetary value of the offering.) He was to evaluate the offering according to a scale in the temple and add a fifth of that amount to the sacrifice and thus make restitution.

What is this kind of sin? What sort of an offense is this? It was to do something with deep sincerity, with utter conviction that you were doing the right thing, and to do so in the name of the Lord, but later to find out that you were wrong, that God didn’t want that done at all. And as I have just returned from traveling across the face of this country from coast to coast, and have been ministering in the Middle West, I have come back with the deep conviction that this is one of the most grievous ways in which we have offended today. We evangelical Christians across this land have been prejudiced and biased in the name of Jesus Christ! We have been loveless in the name of Christ! We have fomented hatred and attack against one another in the name of Christ, and have thought we were honoring God in the doing! As a result our churches are filled with people who are going through empty religious forms and ceremonies, all because they think God wants this, while their hearts are very, very far from him. No wonder this has “turned off” eight out of ten youths in this country today.

A letter was waiting for me when I came back. I want to share some of it with you because I think it expresses this so well. I don’t know the girl who wrote. She is a student in a midwestern university. She evidently got my name from an article of which I am unaware in a paper she had read. She said,

Dear Pastor Stedman,

I can’t understand this drive within me to write you, but I can’t study or think about anything else but writing. I must be ill, because I don’t even know what I’m going to say.

I read an article in a *Today* paper about your church. I’m usually really turned off by articles such as this, but I read it anyway. I guess I feel they’re fake or really making up about 99%. Things don’t happen that way. Church is a place you go and see all these people sitting all “religious” and then they pass their bodies out the church door, noses straight up in the air.

If someone is having problems, something is immediately assumed to be wrong with them, and it’s best to stay away so as not to pick up any of their deadly germs. Or if one should mention a problem, they are weak, and putting a wet blanket on the fun, or

they're no fun to be around, since they are so depressing.

Sure, I go to church. But lately I go back to the dorm sick. This past week I have really come to doubt my sanity. Emotionally I'm a wreck – afraid, confused, depressed, and alone.

I've talked to God, and even found a cool verse I memorized: Psalms 18:18, 19. "On the day when I was weakest, they attacked. But the Lord held me steady. He led me to a place of safety, for he delights in me." But I still feel the same way. It seems I need more.

Then she describes her family life, which is very difficult, and finally says,

Therefore I really think it's neat if everything in the article is on the level, that people in your church really talk about their problems and care for one another. It sounds like Christians are allowed to have problems.

I wish your church a continued blessing, and in this family-type concern, even more growth.

Well, I have to answer that letter this week. I don't know quite what I'll say, except to point out that I'm afraid the condemnation is justified. There has been a great deal of unwitting harm done in the name of Jesus Christ. And when we see it, we need to repent and to make restitution, to try to correct it as far as possible, reaching out to others who are in need.

There is **one other kind of sin** covered by the trespass offering, and it is discussed in the opening part of Chapter 6:

**The LORD said to Moses, "If any one sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor or found that which was lost and lied about it, swearing falsely – in any of all the things which men do and sin therein, when one has sinned and become guilty, he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by oppression, or the deposit which was committed to him, or the lost thing which he found, or anything about which he has sworn falsely; he shall restore it in full, and**

**shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs, on the day of his guilt offering. And he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued by you at the price for a guilt offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things which one may do and thereby become guilty." {Lev 6:1-7 RSV}**

Here is the case of cheating or robbing or defrauding or extorting from a neighbor, or of a false income tax return, or any other form of dishonestly removing someone else's property or reputation. When this is faced, it must be restored. The relationship is broken, and what we need to learn from this offering is that it will never heal until the offense is admitted. Time will not cure this kind of hurt. You can injure somebody in this way today and fifty years might go by before you see that individual again. But when you see them the relationship is still broken, the hurt is still there, and the restraint on your own spirit will be felt immediately. You remember the story about the man who wrote the Internal Revenue Service to report some income tax he had evaded several years before. He included a check with his note and said, "Here is what I owe you. And if I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest!" But that indicates something of the emotional stress which comes with this kind of sin.

I remember that as a young Christian in my early twenties I was working for a contractor as a timekeeper. It was my task to make out the checks at the end of the month, including my own. One month I needed some money and asked my boss if I could have an advance of \$25.00, to which he graciously consented. I wrote out a check which he signed and I cashed it. Then at the end of the month when I was making out the regular checks I actually did forget that I had already drawn \$25. So I made out my own check for the usual amount. It wasn't until after the boss had signed it and given it to me that I remembered. I struggled with myself. I realized that he hadn't remembered either. And I rationalized. I said to myself, "Well, he really owes it to me anyway. I've been working very hard. So I'll just say nothing about it." My job soon ended and I went back to school, and for a

couple of years I went on and lived with that. But I never could forget it. So one day, under the impress of the Spirit, I wrote that man a letter and at great cost to myself, for it was during the Depression days, I sent back the \$25. I didn't know about adding a fifth to it. I'm glad I hadn't read that yet! I told him what I had done, said that I was wrong, and asked him to forgive me. Soon I received a most gracious letter from him inviting me to come back and work for him any time. He said that anyone that honest (even though it took quite awhile) would be welcome to work for him again. And what a load this lifted off my own spirit.

You see, this is what Jesus is talking about when, as recorded in Matthew 5, he says to us: "If you are offering your gift at the altar [i.e., if you are coming to church to worship God], and there remember that your brother has something against you [some broken relationship has not been restored], leave your gift there before the altar," Jesus said, "[i.e., let God stand and wait awhile] and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift," {Matt 5:23-24 RSV}. That will please God more than any amount of trying to worship him while having a broken relationship at home, or with your neighbor, or in your background.

And so this trespass offering is provided for us, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, that we might heal all the broken relationships of the past. This is essential to a clear conscience.

If you want to have a clear conscience before God some of you may have to go back and heal some broken relationships. You may have to make

some restitutions. You may have to admit some errors. But once you do, those relationships will be healed before God, and will be a glory and a blessing to you for the rest of your life.

God knows us and he understands us. He knows that we can't live with this kind of broken relationship for very long. It will begin to trouble us in all kinds of ways. But as we bring it to Jesus Christ, bring the whole situation to him, he will work even in the other person's life, to make him willing to listen, if necessary, or he will do whatever needs to be done in order to heal these relationships and cure the problem of human hurt.

### Prayer:

Our Father, how thoroughly you understand us! How thoroughly you know what can lurk in our life, hidden away, and keep us from living together comfortably with one another. And how wonderfully and wisely you have made provision for us in your Word so that we can live, love, and enjoy life with each other without constant strain and tension. Lord, if any of us are trying to live with a broken relationship, trying to forget it, or ignore it, we pray that you will lead us to do something about it, that we will end the severance and the alienation, and come back again into a delightful relationship with you and with one another, so that we may indeed love our neighbor as ourselves. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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## The Need for a Priest

by Ray C. Stedman

In the book of Leviticus, as in all of the Bible, God is teaching us truth about ourselves. In the Old Testament he does it with what we call “visual aids” – pictures he draws for us by means of the sacrifices, rituals, and ceremonies he prescribes. It takes God to understand man. And he has written a book to go along with us – an instruction book to accompany the machinery he has designed.

If you buy a new television set, refrigerator, or automobile, along with it you get an instruction book compiled by the manufacturer, who understands the machine best. It tells you what to do when things go wrong. That is exactly what the Bible does. It is the greatest book on human psychology in the whole world. Our problem is that we tend to ignore it. A modern parable we so frequently need to heed is: “When all else fails, follow directions!”

Another trouble we have is that we start with the last part of the book, the New Testament, which contains much truth which at first is too advanced for us. That is why the Old Testament was written. It starts at the kindergarten level – with pictures – and these pictures are most illuminating. That is why we are spending our time with this Old Testament book of Leviticus.

Since we have come to a subdivision in the book it might help us to take a few minutes for review. Leviticus falls into two major divisions. The first sixteen chapters are God’s revelation to us of what humanity is like and of his provision to meet our needs. The remainder of the book spells out the performance God expects from us on the basis of

the provision he has made. God never mentions performance without first having talked to us about provision. We tend to get mixed up and put the performance first and thus scare everybody to death so that they won’t even listen to the provision. But God always puts things in the right order.

In past weeks we have been studying some of this revelation about humanity. There are four great truths in this first division of Leviticus that we need to know:

- First we need to realize that we need a sacrifice, a substitute. No man can handle his own problems by himself. Humanity in general is unable to solve its problems by itself. That is the lesson of history. And yet isn’t it strange that as century after century goes by and men wrestle with the same problems in every age but no one ever really seems to learn from that process that we can’t solve them ourselves. Every generation faces the same old problems. And each generation thinks that it alone is really coming to grips with them, that the old generation “blew it” but that the new one is finally going to solve them. But it never happens. God makes very clear that we need a substitute. And that substitute will meet the basic needs of our human life for love, for joy, for peace, for forgiveness before God, and for restoration of relationship with our fellow man. That is what the five sacrifices of Leviticus 1-7 have taught us.

- The second thing God stresses is that we need a priest. We cannot solve our problems even though the sacrifice is provided; there is still need for further help. We will see this in the section we begin this morning with Chapter 8.
- Then, third, we need the revelation of a standard, a measuring stick for life. We need to know what is right and what is wrong, what things are helpful and what are harmful, what will advance us and what will impede us. God gives us this in the section following this one.
- Finally, we need an opportunity to act, and God provides that in the last section of this first division of the book.

Now we want to take a look at this second provision God has made for our humanity – that of **a priest**. No Israelite could offer a sacrifice by himself. He had to have a priest because he needed instruction, he needed somebody to explain the meaning of the sacrifice to him. After it was explained and its value made clear, he needed to have it applied to himself. He needed reassurance that this was something God took seriously, that it was not just an empty ritual but that it accomplished something on his behalf. Then he needed help with the emotional and intellectual problems aroused by the sin and struggle in his life. And God knew all this. He knows that we don't understand ourselves. So he has supplied us with a priesthood.

The basic reason we need a priest is that none of us can see ourselves. We see each other better than we see ourselves. God is always trying to teach us this – even by our physical experience. For instance, you know that you can't look at your own face. By yourself you can't tell the color of your eyes nor the shape of your nose. You have no idea what your face really looks like – without a mirror. A priest is a mirror, another human being standing before us by which we can see a reflection of what we are like. We don't even understand the problems we need to have solved without that kind of help. And God knowing that, and having designed us that way, has given us a priesthood which is particularly skilled and adept at meeting those needs.

You can see from this that the priests were, in a sense, the psychiatrists of the Old Testament. They were the ones to whom people came when they had emotional problems – *hangups*, we call them today.

Priests were skilled at handling problems of guilt and fear and anxiety and hostility, and all the traumas and neuroses and psychoses which can arise out of these. And though I have considerable respect for psychology and psychiatry, nevertheless, I am convinced that these Old Testament priests knew more about human nature than most modern practitioners of these disciplines because they were taught by God himself. So when you read about the priesthood, and see what these priests do, you need to realize that they were not merely conducting religious performances. They were fulfilling the tremendous need of the people for help with their problems. And this is what the priesthood will do for us as we see what it means in our own lives.

Verses 1-4 give us an introduction to this whole subject by describing in very brief compass **the essentials for a priesthood**, the ingredients which make it possible:

**The LORD said to Moses, "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil, and the bull of the sin offering, and the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; and assemble all the congregation at the door of the tent of meeting." And Moses did as the LORD commanded him; and the congregation was assembled at the door of the tent of meeting. {Lev 8:1-4 RSV}**

There God lists for us all the necessary elements for a priesthood:

1. You may have missed the first item on the list. It is the very first few words of the passage: "The LORD said to Moses..."

You see, first comes the word of God. A true priesthood never originates from man's conception of what he needs. It comes from God's word, God's thoughts. God knows us and he has designed this for us. It doesn't come from a pope, nor a council, nor a convention, nor a synod of bishops, nor any other form of human committee. As we will see, this priesthood involves every believer. It is really an expression of the truth that the members of the body of Christ are to minister to one another. And we need to make clear right at the start that this is God's idea, not man's, and that

he initiated the whole process. It began with the word of God.

2. The second element is Aaron and his sons with him. Aaron was the half-brother of Moses. He had a family of boys and these sons were to be associated with him in the priesthood. He and his descendants were the only family in the entire Old Testament authorized to serve as priests. And in this family Aaron himself was to be the chief priest, the high priest.

All of this is beautifully designed by God to teach us truth about ourselves. For, as the book of Hebrews makes very clear, we too have a high priest. Aaron is the picture of that great high priest, Jesus Christ our Lord. And his priesthood is as necessary to us as Aaron's was to the Israelites. When we read about Aaron by himself, serving as high priest, we are looking at a picture of Jesus and of what he can be to us.

If you don't understand this priesthood of Jesus to you today then you are missing out on a great part of your Christian heritage. This is the reason why so many people have a boring Christian life. They don't know the provision God has made for them. And they have so much struggle and weakness because they don't understand the resources which are available to them to meet them in their need and to alleviate their emotional depression. That is why God is teaching us here by this process.

While Aaron is a picture of our great high priest, his sons represent every believer in Jesus Christ, assembled with Christ and serving also as priests. In other words, everyone who knows Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is constituted a priest to the other members of the human family, both to the world at large and to the rest of the body of Christ.

Now, some denominations have a priesthood in which certain men are set aside to serve as priests. I have no objection to that – except that it is not to be exclusive. The true priesthood is not limited to a certain class of people. Every believer, man or woman alike, is a priest. You find this clearly taught in the New Testament: In the book of Revelation, John says that Jesus has made us “a kingdom of priests unto God,” {Rev 1:6 KJV}. Peter says that we have been built into a spiritual house as

living stones, so that we might be a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God {cf, 1 Pet 2:5}.

It is extremely important that we understand what it means to be a priest. It is exciting to be a priest because here we are dealing with all the basic emotional problems that individuals have and are learning how to solve them. So one of the great lessons this book is going to teach us is how to serve effectively as priests to one another and to God.

3. The third ingredient of the priesthood is the garments. A little later on, Moses describes them for us. He is God's representative, and is acting here on God's behalf. He is told to take with him the priests' garments in preparation for the consecration of the priesthood. In the symbolism of Scripture, garments are always a revelation of the character of the individual who wears them. So as we examine this list of garments we will understand what a priest is, what he does, and how he functions.
4. The fourth ingredient of the priesthood is the anointing oil, which, in Scripture, always speaks of the Holy Spirit. This means that a priest, to be effective, always must be walking in the Spirit. You will never be an effective priest unless you learn the ministry of the Holy Spirit, learn how he works in you and through you, imparting the life of Christ to others through you.
5. The next ingredient is the sacrifices. Moses is told to take the bull and the two rams. These always speak of redemption, of the need for dealing with the problem of sin and guilt. Since Aaron and his sons were but men, they too needed sacrifices. But the sacrifices were also food. They were what the priests were to eat, what they were to feed on, what they were to live by. As we come to that we will understand more about what that means.
6. The sixth element of the priesthood was the fact that God told Moses to bring all the congregation together. God insisted on that. He wanted all the adults there, and all the children as well. He wanted the humblest and the greatest in Israel to be present. So Moses had to assemble the whole congregation – more than a million people. That must have created quite a



seating problem! Perhaps they erected grandstands. But in any event they were all to be there in order that God himself might teach them what a priesthood meant. He didn't want anyone to miss it because this was for everyone.

7. Finally, the seventh element was that they were to assemble in front of the tent of meeting, the tabernacle. As we have already seen, the tabernacle is a picture of man. It was built on the pattern upon which we are built. It was a three-fold entity; just as we have body, soul, and spirit, so the tabernacle had a three-fold layout. This is God's way of telling us that he himself will teach us what all this means and that he will do so from within ourselves, from the place where God meets man. Remember that Paul says, "We have received the Spirit of God, by which we might know the things pertaining to God," {cf, 1 Cor 2:12}. God will teach us from within, from the tent of meeting where we live, and will make all this clear to our minds and hearts as we study it together.

That is an introduction to the priesthood. And, beginning here, as Moses was led step by step to give us the account, we will read of the process by which God called this priesthood into being. This morning we will have time to take only one or two steps.

Now, this is going to be very dull and boring to you if you don't see yourself here, if you don't understand that *this is related to you!* You have a great high priest, of whom Aaron is always the picture. And, in fact, *you* are a priest and *you* have the ministry which will be outlined as we study this through.

The **first step** is found in Verses 5-6:

**And Moses said to the congregation, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded to be done." And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water. {Lev 8:5-6 RSV}**

What does that signify?

I hope you are learning to read your Bibles carefully, because God always puts things together. Two things are brought together here which furnish

a clue, a key to help us understand what this means. Don't ignore them.

Moses said, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded to be done." That is, "This is the word of God." And then he washed Aaron and his sons with water. Thus *the word and water* are linked together.

In the New Testament, the third chapter of the Gospel of John, you remember that Jesus said to Nicodemus, that religious intellectual who came to him by night, "Except a man be born of water and of the wind, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," {cf. John 3:5}. What did he mean? Well, water stands for the Word, and wind stands for the Spirit. And except a man be born by believing the Word, thus releasing the operation of the Spirit of God into his life, he can never enter into the kingdom of God. So the word, in its capacity to cleanse and to purify, is pictured for us by water. Jesus uses the same symbol in the fifteenth chapter of John. He says to his disciples, "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you," {cf, John 15:3}.

In the seventeenth chapter {of John}, in his great high priestly prayer, Jesus says of his own, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth," {John 17:14, 17:17-19 RSV}. That is the fulfillment of what we are reading about back here in Leviticus. Jesus, the only one fit to do so, consecrated himself as the great high priest by the washing of the water of the word.

And here Aaron, as his picture, or type, is consecrated with water by Moses. Then the sons are similarly washed. It is by the proclamation of the word that the priesthood operates, and only by that. By that it is prepared for its ministry.

The second step is **the dressing of the high priest in his garments**. Verse 7:

**And he put on him [not on the sons but only on Aaron himself] the coat, and girded him with the girdle, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod upon him, and girded him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod, binding it to him therewith. And he placed the breastpiece on him, and**

**in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. And he set the turban upon his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses. {Lev 8:7-9 RSV}**

This whole ensemble is God's idea.

What are the meanings of these garments? Well, if you simply follow the exciting pattern of the Old Testament you are given clues as to what Jesus Christ is prepared to be and to do in your life, for the garments reflect the character and the quality of the great high priest. Let's look at them:

A. When Moses began dressing him Aaron didn't have anything on. He had just been washed with water and he was naked. Then, at the command of God, Moses put an inner garment upon him, a white linen coat of sorts, which fit closely around Aaron's body and served as his undergarment. He bound it around him with an inner girdle. After Aaron was fully dressed these two items were invisible. And yet each has its own significance.

a) In Scripture a coat is always a picture of the righteousness of an individual. This inner coat is a picture of that inner, hidden righteousness of the Lord Jesus which only God could see. Jesus had a purity within – which God could discern but man could not. That is why the Father spoke as he did at the baptism of Jesus, which took place after almost thirty years of life in the town of Nazareth. Many have wondered what kind of a person Jesus was as a growing boy. Did he ever misbehave and get into trouble? The Father spoke from heaven and said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," {Matt 3:17}. There was nothing at all wrong inside. He had that inner righteousness.

b) A girdle, in Scripture, always symbolizes a servant. This inner girdle represents that inner spirit of servitude, that willingness to be a servant which our Lord reflects, and again which man could not see but which God the Father saw. Do you remember how Paul puts it in Philippians? He says that Jesus, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a

thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross," {Phil 2:6-8 RSV}. It is that inner willingness to stoop and meet us at our lowest need which is characteristic of the life of our great high priest.

B. Over these garments Moses put the outer robe. This is described in Exodus {28:31-34, 39:22-26} as an exquisite robe of finely woven cloth, all of one piece and colored a brilliant and beautiful blue. Again this robe speaks of righteousness, but, in this case, the visible righteousness which men could see. Jesus challenged his critics, saying, "Which of you convinces me of sin?" {cf, John 8:46}. That is, "Here is my life. Look it over. Do you find any fault in it?" No one could. Even Pilate, the Roman official who examined his life judicially, was compelled to say, "I find no fault in him." He had that outward, visible righteousness which man could see.

C. Over the robe was put the ephod. This was a kind of vestment, a surplice, or tunic, which hung from the shoulders of the priest down to his knees. It was always the mark of the high priest's authority because it hung from his shoulders, which in Scripture are the symbol of authority and power. In promising the coming of Jesus, Isaiah says, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder," {Isa 9:6a RSV}. By this ephod we are reminded of Jesus' words just before he ascended into the heavens. He said to his disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth," {Matt 28:18b KJV}.

I would like to stress that, because we tend to think that he has power in heaven, yes, but that men can turn aside his purposes on earth. That is not true. All power is given to him in heaven and on earth. He is able to act as he chooses. Half the trouble of the church today is that we have forgotten the source of our power, have lost sight of the fact that we have a high priest who is authoritative, whose word carries weight, who "opens and no man shuts; and shuts and no man opens," {cf, Rev 3:7 RSV}.

When you ask him to act on your behalf and he does so there is nothing which can stop him. We need to keep our eyes on this priest of power, this high priest who is able to undergird us in the midst of this troubled, confused, and mixed-up world. Otherwise we will lose all sense of control in life and will just drift about frightened and upset.

- D. Around the ephod was bound the golden girdle, a very beautiful band of cleverly woven cloth intertwined with gold. Again, the girdle is a picture of the servitude of Jesus, but in this case his outward servant character, i.e., his obvious willingness to stoop to meet our need, whatever it is. This means that our great high priest, with all his power and authority, is willing to meet us right where we are.

You don't need to pop a pill and have your mind expanded before you can find God. He will meet you. He is great enough and powerful enough and good enough to meet you right where you are, on his terms, and as a servant to stoop to your weakness.

Remember that in the upper room Jesus bound a towel around himself and began to wash his disciples' feet. Thus he manifested his willingness to meet their need even when they were ashamed of it, and ashamed of themselves. Peter tried to reject this ministry. But the Lord said, "There was no way you can be helped, Peter, if you do not accept my servant character," {cf, John 13:4-17}.

So here is this high priest, bound with a girdle to remind us that Jesus is willing to be our servant and to meet us at the place of our need.

- E. Then, in the middle of Aaron's breast, Moses hung the breastpiece. This was a square of gold on which were written the names of all twelve tribes of Israel. Thus Israel was reminded that the high priest held closest to his heart, in affectionate concern, every one of the people of Israel. As this is applied through Jesus to all God's people it has the tremendously reassuring meaning that our Lord Jesus always holds close to his heart, in very deep, affectionate concern, the needs of every one of his own. He is deeply involved with each of us. He knows where you are and what you are going through. He is greatly concerned about it.

Once you realize this you need never be discouraged again, because Jesus holds you close to his heart.

- F. In the midst of the breastpiece, Moses put the two instruments called the Urim and Thummim. Now, what are these? No one really knows. Strangely enough they are never described in the Bible. Even the ancient rabbis lost any description of what these looked like.

Their names mean "Lights" and "Perfections." And, though we don't know what they looked like, we know what they were for. Clearly they were used by the priests to determine the mind and the will of God concerning specific events. Whenever a king, or even an ordinary person, desired to know what God wanted him to do, he came to the priest, and, through the Urim and the Thummim, the priest was able to help him. It was the way to find direction in life.

We are getting very close to the true meaning of these when we translate the words *Insights* and *Outworkings*. You see, "lights" are insights. And "perfections" are the outworkings of circumstances to accomplish the goal God has in mind. When a problem arose, an individual brought it to the priest who would use these instruments to gain insight from God into the nature of the problem. Then he also received assurance from God that the way God was moving would work the problem out to perfection. As you well know, if you have had any experience as a Christian, this corresponds exactly with what the Spirit of God does in our hearts through the Word of God and through the counsel of other members of the priesthood of God. He helps us to gain an understanding of the problem and to have reassurance that he is working out his perfect purposes in our lives.

My patron saint, Dr. H. A. Ironside, used to tell of a young man who was a recent graduate of a theological seminary. Educated beyond his intelligence, he had arrived at the spot where he thought he knew all the answers to all the theological problems. He came to a certain town where there lived an old Christian layman who had never been to a Bible school, nor a seminary, but had taught himself the Word of God under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. In a very humble way he had gained a

reputation as a man of wise counsel. When this young theologian heard about him, he said, "I'd like to meet that man. I think I could ask him a question or two that he couldn't answer!" So a meeting was arranged. The first thing the young man said was, "Sir, I hear that you have quite a reputation as a Bible student. I'd like to ask you a question." The old man said, "Well, I don't know if I can answer it but I'd be glad to try. What is your question?" The young man said, "Tell me, what were the Urim and the Thummim?" The old man thought a moment, then said, "Well, sir, I don't really know – and I don't think anyone else does either. We do know the names mean 'Lights' and 'Perfections' and that these were instruments by which the high priest could determine the mind of God in specific instances. Beyond that I don't think I could go. But you know, I've found that if you change just one letter in these words you have the instrument by which I can know the mind and will of God for me, in my life." The young man was a bit puzzled. "What do you mean?" The old man said, "Well, if you change the 'r' in Urim to an 's', you'll make it 'Usim and Thummim.' And when I want to know the mind of God, I just take the pages of my Bible and I 'usim and thummim.' And, by that means, I can learn what I need to know!"

I don't know how theologically accurate that is but I think the old man had arrived at a very practical approach to exactly what the Urim and Thummim were for in the Old Testament day.

- G. On the head of the priest Moses set a turban, a beautiful cloth bound around his head. This is a symbolic picture of the mind under control, the intelligence of the priest in subjection to the workings of God. It represents what Paul describes in Second Corinthians as "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," {2 Cor 10:5 KJV}. The priesthood is to use its intelligence under the control of the mind and will of God. This is what our great high priest does. He embodies all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and works intelligently on our behalf under the control of the mind and will and purpose of God the Father in our lives. And that is what we also are to do,

as priests, as we begin to understand the things of God.

- H. Finally, squarely in the middle of the turban Moses set the golden plate which is called the crown of the high priest. Only the high priest wore it. Inscribed on it were the words, "Holiness to the LORD." As we have already learned from the book of Leviticus the word *holiness* really means "wholeness." God's purpose among men is to make us into whole people again. This is a beautiful picture of how our great high priest always holds in public purview his ultimate purpose in our lives: to make us whole before the Lord. And as the Lord Jesus works in your life and mine this is what he is working toward.

The book of Hebrews tells us "We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," {cf, Heb 4:15 KJV}.

- He has known discouragement and the way it feels.
- He has known hostility and the contradiction against himself of people who were intent upon sabotaging every effort he made.
- He has wept with those who wept.
- He was angry when he saw injustice stalking the earth unopposed.
- He got indignant with those who were oppressing others.
- He spoke scorching words to those who stood in the way of people who were seeking help.
- He understands how men feel.
- He knows how you feel.
- He knows where you are!

Whatever your problem may be at this moment, he has been where you are. He has all power and he has a servant heart, ready to meet you at your place of need. And he knows how to work your problems out. The reason we are so weak and so faltering, as people of God, is that we lose sight of this great high priest who is so capable, and so ready to meet us right where we are, and who is available to us twenty-four hours a day.

## The Need for a Priest

God would have us focus our eyes again upon this One who is equipped with all that it takes to meet all of our needs.

### **Prayer:**

Our heavenly Father, we pray that you will take our eyes away from our problems. We are sometimes so emotionally caught up in them that we just keep wallowing in our difficulties and worrying about them, and we get anxious, fretful, and angry over them. Help us to lift our eyes unto this

great high priest who is within us, ready to meet us right at the door of the tent of meeting, right in the heart of our own individual lives, and to release to us there all the mighty resources available to him. Help us to begin to lay hold of these resources and to understand that you are not trifling with your people, but that you are very serious about meeting our needs and have made a realistic provision which works. Help us to take this seriously, we ask in Jesus' great name, Amen.

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## The Work of a Priest

by Ray C. Stedman

I want to speak to you this morning as to a company of priests. I wonder how many of you have thought of yourselves in that way?

If you have read anything at all about the Protestant Reformation you know that 400 years ago in Germany, a monk by the name of Martin Luther began to dig up, and bring into light and focus, certain truths which the Scriptures teach but which had been lost sight of for centuries. One of the most radical of these ideas was what he called "the priesthood of every believer." In those days, the church taught that there was a body of men set aside to be a special group of priests who acted as a kind of intermediary between God and the rest of ordinary men, but Martin Luther exploded that idea. He taught from the Scriptures that there is no such body at all but that every person who comes to know Jesus Christ is constituted a priest under God and that he joins with the great high priest, Jesus Christ himself, in a ministry of mercy, blessing, and service to a world which is fragmented and bleeding and broken, that this is *our* ministry, this is the calling to which God has called *us*. That idea hit with radical impact in Europe as people began to catch on to the exciting adventure of being this kind of a priest unto God. Thus developed the great historical movement which brought into being a whole new way of life for our western world — what today we call *the Protestant Reformation*.

In the 400 years since that time, unfortunately, that truth has largely been lost sight of again. Once again, all over this country, congregations sit, and soak, and sour. They are absorbing, but not giving out. They are being taught, in many places, but are not loving. As a result they have lost the excitement of the Christian experience. They are bored and frustrated and fearful, and they don't know

what to do with themselves, because they have lost this great secret. But I am excited today that the Spirit of God is calling us back to a rediscovery of the priesthood of every believer. This is the subject we are examining in this great passage in the book of Leviticus, the eighth chapter.

We will continue this morning the study we began last Sunday of the day on which Moses, under the command of God, established on earth a body of priests: a priesthood. He began, as we saw last week, by setting aside first of all the high priest. That was Aaron, the half-brother of Moses. Throughout the Scriptures, therefore, Aaron becomes a type, or picture, of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. It was quite fitting that Aaron be set aside first, before his sons, because the sons of Aaron are a picture of the priesthood of every believer. As we look at this passage you are going to learn some very exciting things about what God can do with your life to make it the most exciting adventure you have ever dreamed of, to enable you to become the instrument of the working of God in the lives of others.

As we saw last Sunday, the high priest was first washed and then clad in his beautiful garments. Each of those garments is a revelation of an aspect of the work of our great high priest, of what he is able to do for us. So the Lord Jesus Christ fulfills this picture in our lives today. I do not know of any truth more greatly needed in our day, and, I am sure, in this congregation, than the great truth of the immediate availability of the Lord Jesus Christ as our high priest to meet our emotional and intellectual problems right where we are living today. There is no way in which life can be handled adequately other than on the basis of that provision.

But now, moving on in the chapter, beginning with Verse 10, we read:

**Then Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the laver and its base, to consecrate them. And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head, and anointed him, to consecrate him. And Moses brought Aaron's sons, and clothed them with coats, and girded them with girdles, and bound caps on them, as the LORD commanded Moses. {Lev 8:10-13 RSV}**

There is the anointing of the high priest. It took place, you notice, before the sons were anointed, even before they were dressed. That is very significant because that is exactly what happened in history. Here you see one of those beautiful examples of how the Old Testament, written hundreds and hundreds of years before the earthly ministry of our Lord, yet captures exactly what Jesus did when he came and fulfilled these words. You recall that, when Jesus went down to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist, after the baptism, John said, "Behold, the heavens were opened and I saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,'" {cf, Matt 3:16-17}. That was God's anointing of the great high priest by a symbol of the Holy Spirit, the dove, so that his ministry as a priest would always be a Spirit-filled ministry. Now here you have the same thing beautifully portrayed. Moses takes the oil, which also is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and he anoints the high priest, Aaron. And he does so prior to the anointing of the sons. Just as Jesus was anointed for his ministry long before the anointing of the disciples by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, so here Aaron is anointed before his sons.

But following the anointing of Aaron, Moses brought Aaron's sons and clothed them with coats, and girded them with girdles, and bound caps on them. Here we are moving into a picture of our own ministry. We are to the Lord Jesus Christ in our own priestly ministry as Aaron's sons were to him. Just as the garments of the high priest were a picture of his character and of what he could do, so

these three items are a picture of our ministry and of what we can do. Now don't take this impersonally! This is God speaking to you. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ this, is what God calls you to, and this is the provision for it.

First of all there is the *coat*. As we saw in connection with the high priest, the coat is a picture of the righteousness of Christ imparted to us. We are clad in his righteousness. That is, we don't please God and earn his approval by our activity on his behalf. I know lots of Christians across this country who are working their fingers to the bone, who have dedicated themselves to what they regard as the work of the church, and who work long, exhausting hours with the hope that somehow it will make God more pleased with them. But if you labor on that basis as a priest before God you will find yourself under a cloud of guilt which will never dispel itself. You will find yourself always wondering whether you have done quite enough. And as a result you will be discouraged and defeated all the time. But the true priest of God is called to put on the coat of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. So you are allowed to make some mistakes! You are allowed to fail at times, because it isn't your ministry which is going to make you acceptable in God's sight; it is his. His life makes you accepted in the Beloved. That is the meaning of the coat.

Around the coat was bound the *girdle*. As we have also seen, the girdle, in Scripture, is always a picture of a servant character. It signifies a willingness on the part of every believer to meet other people at the point of their need, right where they are, right where they hurt, to stoop and give ourselves to that purpose and not to be concerned whether we get anything out of it or not – just as the Lord Jesus, in the Upper Room on the night that he was betrayed, took a towel and girded himself, and, with a wash basin, began to wash the disciples' feet {John 13:1-17}. Why did he start with washing their feet? Because their feet were dirty; they needed to be washed. And, though he was the Lord of glory, it didn't stop him from taking towel and basin, and beginning to wash their feet. That is the ministry of a servant. This is what we are called to do – to meet people right where they need us and to help them there.

Recently my wife and I were back in Charlotte, North Carolina. As we boarded the plane for our

return flight home we noticed a rather large woman ahead of us who had a tiny boy with her. She announced to all within earshot that this little boy was her grandson, and that anyone who wanted to have him was welcome to him because he was a terrible nuisance, and she didn't want to be troubled with him. She kept declaiming all the way up the steps and into the plane so that everybody, I noticed, was being very careful not to sit near her.

But as it happened, she ended up in the row right across the aisle from us. We were beginning to take off when my wife and I looked over and saw her there all huddled up in her seat with her eyes closed, biting her fingernails, and obviously scared to death. Elaine said to me, "Do you know what her trouble is? She's scared!" Sagely I said, "Yes, it does appear that way." (You could almost see the sweat dripping off her palms!) And I said, "Would you like to help her?" – because Elaine was sitting in the aisle seat as my buffer! She unbuckled her seat belt, slid across the aisle, and sat down beside this woman (much to the distress of the stewardess, because we had actually started our takeoff run).

Buckling herself into the seat Elaine said to her, "Are you scared?" The woman said, "I'm scared to death! I just don't know what to do! I wish I could get aboard a plane and not be so frightened." Elaine said, "I know just how you feel. For years that happened to me. Every time I'd get aboard a plane I'd feel terribly frightened. But it doesn't bother me anymore. The fear is all gone." The woman said, "How did you get over it?" Elaine told her, "Well, we live in California and we've come to Charlotte for Billy Graham Day. Since you live here in Charlotte I'm sure you know of his ministry." The woman said, "Oh, yes!" Elaine said, "Have you ever heard George Beverly Shea on television or in a crusade stand up and sing 'He's Got the Whole World in His Hands'?" She said, "Yes, I've heard him sing it." Elaine told her, "That song has particular significance to me because I know now that I am in God's hands, and that knowledge removes my fear. And incidentally it may comfort you to know that Bev Shea is sitting two seats behind you on this plane!" And the woman said, "Well, everything's all right, then, isn't it?" And in a few minutes she began to display a quite different attitude – and was back to her usual troublesome self! But perhaps a seed was planted. And this basically is the ministry of a

priest. This is what priesthood is for – to meet people at the point of their need.

What excitement comes into our lives when we begin to discover that God wants to use us that way! You see, priesthood doesn't go on in temples today – not in sanctuaries under stained-glass windows – by men with stained-glass voices. Rather, it goes on out in homes and shops and schools and playgrounds and parks – places where people are. That is the kind of ministry God is calling us to – that of a servant who moves in where people hurt, where they need us, and, even though it may cost us something or be a bit unpleasant at times, begins to minister to their need at that level.

The third article of clothing was the *cap* bound around the head. And as we saw, just as the turban on the high priest is a picture of the mind bound by the authority of the Word of God, captured and held by that word of reality, so this cap of the priest is a picture of the mind under the control of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul puts it in First Corinthians 2:16, "We have the mind of Christ." And in Second Corinthians 10:5 he says that we are to "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." That means to look at life as Jesus sees it, as he reveals it to us, and to set aside all the illusions and fantasies and delusions that this world follows. We are not to adopt their standard of values and their system of gaining power and precedence over others, but are to look at life the way God sees it, and to have the mind, as we are thinking through our problems and approaching our situation, under the control of the word of God and the authority of Jesus Christ. All this is necessary to priesthood: the righteousness of Christ, the servant-attitude, and the mind under the authority of Christ. And when you are in this relationship you can be a priest to this poor, broken, fragmented, bewildered, and hurting world, and you will find many opportunities to do so.

Next in this process of establishing the priesthood came the sacrifices. We will not deal with them at any great length because we have already looked at them and at what they mean. But I do want to call attention at this point to the fact that it was necessary to offer sacrifices. As the letter to the Hebrews makes clear, the Lord Jesus, as the fulfillment of the great high priest, has no need to offer sacrifices for himself, for he was without sin. But Aaron was a man, and his sons were men.



They needed these sacrifices and so they offered them.

First was *the sin offering*, described for us in Verses 14-17. This is God's continual reminder to us that the basic, elementary, fundamental problem about human nature is our tainted, twisted, distorted, fallen self, and that we never can solve a single problem until we start on that basis and deal with the problem of evil in human life. We can never go from there until we have recognized that God has dealt with this in Christ. That is why the sin offering comes into this account over and over again. It is God's constant reminder.

I stress that because there are many books circulated today which are being read by Christians and which suggest that if you simply learn how to think differently, if you learn how to discover hidden possibilities within your self, if you learn how to develop all the powers of your personality in a proper way, and learn psychologically how to relate properly to people, you can, by that very process, achieve success in life and can also have a more powerful witness as a Christian. Now, there are many good ideas in these books. But almost invariably you will find that in them there is no dealing with the fundamental problem of human evil. There is no recognition that the flesh – all that we are as natural men – has been set aside by the cross of Christ as producing nothing whatsoever of value, and that it is only on the basis of trust in the activity of the Spirit of God within us that despite all the quirks of our personalities our human potential can be fulfilled. If you read these books on that basis, then they make good sense. But if you don't, if you miss that proviso, then these books can be very damaging.

Just this week somebody came and talked to me about a book on psychocybernetics, a book which, if followed without any recognition of the basis upon which we must live, will be very destructive. It will lead into an exaltation of the flesh, into a way of trying to make work what God not only says cannot work, but which he would never accept even if it did. But if it is read in the light of the sin offering, in the light of the fact that we need to operate on a new basis, a new arrangement for living, then there are many ideas in the book which can be helpful.

Following the sin offering came *the burnt offering*, in Verses 18-21. I will simply remind you that the burnt offering is a picture of the life wholly

available to God, in terms of the words carved behind me here on this platform: "You are not your own; you are bought with a price," {cf, 1 Cor 6:19b-20a}. That is not harsh nor severe; that is the way fulfillment is achieved – by recognizing that God loves you, owns you, and wants to use you, wants you to say "Yes, Lord, here I am to be used as a priest."

Then the third offering was *the offering of ordination*, given in Verses 22-24, which we will read:

**Then he [Moses] presented the other ram, the ram of ordination; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. And Moses killed it, and took some of its blood and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the great toe of his right foot. And Aaron's sons were brought, and Moses put some of the blood on the tips of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the toes of their right feet, and Moses threw the blood upon the altar round about. {Lev 8:22-24 RSV}**

What a strange ceremony that is!

What does it signify? I think it is almost obvious if you have followed along in the meanings of these symbols. Blood is always a reminder to us that we have no value apart from the death of Christ on our behalf and our life again in him. That is all that God ever accepts as of any value whatsoever out of our time here on earth. And here the priest is to have a blood-stained ear, a blood-stained thumb, and a blood-stained toe.

- He is to *hear* God's word as someone who has already been redeemed, who listens to the Word of God with the recognition that he is not merely hearing some good ideas but is listening to that which can release him and relieve him of pressures and problems – all because he has already been bought by that blood. In other words, we are to hear the Word of God not as mere philosophy but as that which teaches us instructively, deep within our hearts.
- And then we are to *serve* man. That is what is always symbolized by the hand, the thumb, probably the most useful member of the human body. We are to serve as blood-stained people,

recognizing that we have no righteousness in ourselves, that we are just like everybody else, no better than anyone else, and we offer our help not with self-righteous judgmentalism, not “holier than thou,” not as people who have achieved perfection, but as ones who, like those we help, are very much in need of the constant cleansing of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Remember that in his letter to the Galatians Paul says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted,” {cf, Gal 5:1}. That is, remind yourself that you may be the next one to fall. And when you fall you don’t want someone coming to you pointing the finger and judging you severely, saying, “Look at what you’ve done. Why, I’d never do a thing like that!” Rather, you want someone to come to you with the realization: “Brother, maybe I’ve never done what you’ve done, but I know I certainly could have. If it weren’t for God’s grace I long ago would have done worse than that. I just want you to know that I understand how you feel right now, and I want to see you cleansed as God is able to cleanse.”

- Finally there is the blood-stained foot, which represents *walking* through life with a reminder that the cleansing of God’s grace is needed every day, that we never are perfect in this life, that though God has made provision for a life of service and of walking in the Spirit, nevertheless we all have failed to some extent every day in laying hold of it. God has understood that and has made provision for it, for cleansing us as we walk.

The offerings continue with the offering of the fat and the thigh and the breast, and then conclude with the meal offering. Verses 25-29:

**Then he took the fat, and the fat tail, and all the fat that was on the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and the right thigh; and out of the basket of unleavened bread which was before the LORD he took one unleavened cake, and one cake of bread with oil, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat and on the right thigh; and he put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of**

**his sons, and waved them as a wave offering before the LORD. Then Moses took them from their hands, and burned them on the altar with the burnt offering, as an ordination offering, a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. And Moses took the breast, and waved it for a wave offering before the LORD; it was Moses’ portion of the ram of ordination, as the LORD commanded Moses. {Lev 8:25-29 RSV}**

We don’t need to dwell upon these. We have seen already that the fat, the thigh, and the breast symbolize richness, strength, and peace in the inner life acceptable to God. The meal offering is a type of the human response which says, “Here I am, Lord, my humanity is at your disposal. I’m ready to be used of you.”

**Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood [notice that – the oil and the blood] which was on the altar, and sprinkled it upon Aaron and his garments, and also upon his sons and his sons’ garments; so he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him. {Lev 8:30 RSV}**

Here is another beautiful example of how the Scriptures are so accurate. When Moses anointed Aaron as a type of Christ, our great high priest, he used only oil, the symbol of the Holy Spirit. But when he anointed the sons, who are a picture of our priesthood, he used oil and blood – oil to symbolize the Holy Spirit, and blood to represent the redeeming value of the death of Jesus – so that our priesthood is based upon a dual recognition that we are to minister in the power of the Spirit and on the basis of a personal experience of the forgiveness of sin. And that is the only right we have as priests to approach other people. If you attempt to help someone else on any other basis than you are offering “strange fire before the LORD” {Lev 10:1 KJV}; we are going to see the result of that in the next chapter. But on the basis of being forgiven yourself and of recognizing that the Spirit of God can work through you, then you can actually help.

Finally we read:

**And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, “Boil the flesh at the door of the tent of meeting, and there eat it and the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I**

**commanded, saying, ‘Aaron and his sons shall eat it’; and what remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn with fire. And you shall not go out from the door of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed, for it will take seven days to ordain you. As has been done today, the LORD has commanded to be done to make atonement for you. At the door of the tent of meeting you shall remain day and night for seven days, performing what the LORD has charged, lest you die; for so I am commanded.’ And Aaron and his sons did all the things which the LORD commanded by Moses. {Lev 8:31-36 RSV}**

And no wonder! When Moses added the words, “If you don’t stay here night and day for seven days, if you leave this place, you will die,” they took him seriously and decided to stay where they were. They did all that the Lord had commanded. Because God is very serious about these things he can be ruthless when he needs to be. As we will see in the very next chapter there is an instance when that became necessary.

God’s command to Aaron and his sons was to stay there in the doorway of the tent of meeting. You know that the tabernacle is a picture of the human body. In our human bodies, interpreting this to apply to us, we are to wait and feast upon the symbols of the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf: the right thigh of the animal, which is the symbol of his strength; the breast, representing his affection for us; and the bread of the meal offering, symbolic of the life of Christ, available to us. We are to feed on these, symbolically, for seven days, like these priests, until strength is perfected.

Seven is always the number of perfection in Scriptures. This is a little clue as to how God works. We ask him to do things for us and we often get upset because he doesn’t respond like the genie in the Arabian Nights tale who suddenly appears when we rub the lamp and cries, “Master, here I am; what do you want me to do?” Even though we have asked him in accordance with his promises to act, sometimes he seemingly delays. But here we see a process of feeding and waiting, which is God’s way of working strength out to perfection. These priests were taught, right from the start, that the way God works often is to delay, seemingly, in answering. In the meantime we are

called upon to feed, to think, to remind ourselves of the strength of the One who was sacrificed on our behalf, the Lord Jesus, and of his love for us, and his life available to us, and thus to await God’s working out of his purpose.

That is one of the hardest things in life to do. As I have been trying to live through this past summer, which has been a difficult one for me, I have had to learn to wait upon God in a way that I had never learned before. It has been a very difficult lesson. This is what the New Testament calls becoming “strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might,” {Eph 6:10 RSV}.

At a pastors’ conference this past week this was the theme that I was given the responsibility of developing, from the sixth chapter of Ephesians. The passage concerns the spiritual warfare of the believer. It begins with those stirring words of charge, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” {Eph 6:10 RSV}. It was wonderful to watch the Spirit of God dealing with the men at this conference. As we came to the end of our time together it had become abundantly evident to every man there that the world in which we live is such a mixed up, troubled, torn, and bleeding world that the only source of strength and power adequate to handle it available today, for any person, is to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. We learned that wickedness is so massive and so entrenched in our day, that darkness is so intense upon the minds and in the thinking of men, that the troubles people are going through are so tangled and so apparently hopeless, that violence is so close to the surface and indifference so widespread that to try to tackle such tremendous evil apart from the strength which is made available to us in Jesus Christ is a hopeless task. But as we learn to rest and to feed and to wait upon God these problems can be solved. What a ministry this opens up before us!

In our next study together we will go on into Chapter 9 where we will look at the eighth day, which is always a day of resurrection. And something marvelous happens on the eighth day. But all of this is given to teach us how God is working in our lives right now.

My question to you is:

- Have you discovered your priesthood?

- Are you willing to be that kind of a priest now, as God has called you to be?
- Will you reach out to this fragmented world with all its trouble and heartache, and toward one another – we need each other’s ministry as priests – and thus discover how exciting it can be to be the means by which God begins to change lives all around you?

I challenge you to try it!

You will discover that God means every word he says and that the ministry of the Great High Priest himself to your own heart is all that it takes to equip you for what God has given you to do. Go out and be God’s priest in this world, this week! Find someone at the point of his need, ask the Holy Spirit to work through you as you go about meeting that need, and see how God can use you as a priest. What an exciting ministry it will be!

**Prayer:**

Our heavenly Father, thank you for this look at Aaron and his sons. We ask you to open our spiritual eyes so that we can see beyond Aaron and his sons to Jesus Christ and his family, the great body of Christ of which we are a part. As you are calling us to this priesthood and asking us to be available on these terms in our daily life we ask you, Lord, to teach us how to do this. We pray that you will set before us circumstances which will give us opportunity. And may there be not one of us who knows the Lord Jesus who will say, “This doesn’t apply to me.” Help us to expect you to move in this way and to bring to us this week someone in need to whom we can be a priest through the strength and power of the One who has been a great priest to us, our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask in his name, Amen.

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## The Present Glory

by Ray C. Stedman

This has been one of the toughest years I have ever put in, this summer especially. I have mentioned before that a problem of grave concern to my heart, a heavy burden laid upon me, has taxed me to a great degree. Several times during the summer the situation reached a state of crisis in which I felt extremely pressured, even oppressed. And every such time my own personal prayer seemed to be unavailing. I had never in my life prayed as much, but I wasn't getting any relief – no matter how long I prayed. But each time God sent me just the right person, at precisely the proper moment, to say a word which helped me. Sometimes they weren't even aware of it. Other times they were. On one occasion I had reached the point where I felt I was beating my head against a brick wall and emotionally and physically I was about to break with the strain when a man came to town from out of state. He told me afterward that he hadn't really any reason to come through here – he just did. I had been thinking about him and wishing I could talk with him – when suddenly I learned he was here. We met for lunch and he said a few words to me which simply delivered me!

We have all had experiences like this. They are ways in which God underscores to us the need for a priest – for that is the process of priesthood. That is the ministry of a fellow-priest in the body of Christ.

This is a great truth which the church has largely lost sight of in our generation. Martin Luther rediscovered it back in the days of the Reformation when he brought to light again what he called “the priesthood of every believer,” the capacity each of us has to be used in the life of someone else to help him by the power of God in a time of intellectual or emotional struggle. That is the subject we are examining in the eighth and ninth

chapters of Leviticus as we are studying through the provisions God makes for the basic needs of our humanity.

We have already seen how he meets the need to be loved, and to love in return, the need for peace, the need to have our guilt removed, and the need for restoration of relationship with others. All of these are so beautifully symbolized in the visual aids God has given us in the five offerings of Leviticus.

And then we came to the need for a priest. We have seen that here too God has made ample provision – first of all in the great high priest he has given to us, our Lord Jesus. He is the underlying resource of every Christian. If there is any truth which needs to be recaptured and lived again in our daily experience it is the availability of the Lord Jesus as our great high priest, as he is symbolized by Aaron in the Old Testament.

And with Aaron were his sons, who are a picture of the priesthood of the believer, of the ministry each of us can have with one another in meeting the emotional and intellectual problems of life.

In our last study together we looked in the eighth chapter at the process of priesthood, tracing the way by which God produces priests. This began, you remember, with the washing, clothing, and the anointing with oil of Aaron as the high priest, beautifully picturing what Jesus Christ has been set apart by the Holy Spirit to do – both in the days of his flesh, and now in his risen life through the work of the Spirit in our lives today. Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and his activity. Then the sons of Aaron gathered with him to share this priesthood. They too went through the process of being washed, clothed, and anointed, not only with oil but also with blood, symbolizing the necessity for cleansing from sin in their lives and in ours. Finally at the end of Chapter 8 we found them feast-

ing together in the tabernacle on the thigh of the ordination offering and the bread of the cereal offering, symbols of strength and life imparted to them by the sacrifice made on their behalf, pictures of our life in Christ. And, you recall, Moses then gave strict orders for Aaron and his sons to stay in the tabernacle for seven days and not to leave, lest they die.

Now, the ninth chapter continues this process and introduces us to the final steps in becoming priests. It opens with a very instructive word:

**On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel; {Lev 9:1 RSV}**

I hope you are becoming familiar with the significance of numbers as well as the other various symbols employed in the Old Testament. They are God's wonderful visual aids to help us understand truth which is very important to us.

The eighth day is highly significant! Eight is the number of a new beginning – a resurrection, in other words. So the eighth day is a symbol of resurrection life. This is not mere guesswork. Not only is this number used this way consistently throughout the Old Testament and the New, but it is also stamped right into nature itself:

- For instance, there is the week. Today is the eighth day. It is the beginning of a new week. We have just lived through the seven days of the past week and now we are beginning again. One of the strange mysteries of human life is the week. It is easy to explain why we have months. They correspond to the phases of the moon. The year, of course, is the time it takes the earth to revolve around the sun. But no one can explain why we have the week. Nothing in the physical world corresponds with it. Yet from the earliest times the human family has observed the week.
- Or consider the tones of the musical scale. You know that an octave consists of seven notes with an eighth note which is the first of a new octave. Do, re, me, fa, so, la, ti, do.

So eight corresponds to a new note, a new day, a new beginning.

By this means God is teaching us that the process of priesthood, the ministry of being a priest, must be on the basis of resurrection power. We must trust in the resurrected life of a living Lord within us – new life, a new beginning – not in the natural resources of our old life, with its attempt to garner wisdom from here and there and put it all together and thus to muddle through. We have all been subjected to “good advice” by well-meaning people which, when followed, often has led us into some of the most difficult times of our lives. But here God is wiping all that out. He says, “I don't want you to rest on that. I want you to operate from resurrection life, from the Scriptures understood in the power of the Holy Spirit, and to relate sensitively to the needs of individuals so that the advice you give as priests will not be your wisdom, but mine.” That is what this all means. And that is why Moses insisted that these priests not leave the tabernacle for seven days. God had said, “If you leave before seven days are up, you will die.” By that means he is saying, “Look, don't try to operate as a priest on any basis other than resurrection power. It will never work. You will produce only death if you try to do it in any other way!”

That very instructive word can be such a help to us, for this is the problem with which much of the church today. I have just returned from traveling about in the Middle West, and, once again, I come back somewhat disheartened. Here on the West Coast we are seeing much new life coming into the churches. But in the rest of the nation this is just barely beginning in a few spots. For the most part the evangelical churches are carrying on in a very sterile, dry, dull, empty shell of performance, with services which are appallingly dull and are turning off most of the youth of their areas. Young people are frankly saying so all over the country. What is the reason for this? Well, it is largely because we have substituted for the intended power by which Christians are to live the processes which the world lives on around us. We have substituted slick organization and electronic techniques and high-gear promotion and pressure tactics as the means by which we hope the church will affect the world. But God's people have never moved successfully on that basis, either in the Scriptures or in subsequent history. God is continually striving through his word to teach us that he doesn't depend upon majority vote to win his battles. He always selects just a handful of people.

I was reading an article the other day in which a Christian writer said, evidently with considerable rejoicing, that it looked as if Brazil in the next few years would become the first Protestant nation of Latin America. The church is growing so rapidly in Brazil that soon we might expect 51% of the population to have become Protestant. And that, according to this article, would be the hopeful day when, at last, by the power of numbers, the church could begin to sway the nation. But God never waits for that! He always moves through a handful. It isn't necessary for us to be a majority of the population, ever. God is always teaching us that fact by sending people home, turning them away, driving them back.

Jesus spoke to his disciples and said things that were hard to accept and many began to leave him, John says in Chapter 6 of his gospel. Even the twelve disciples acted as though they too were going to leave. So Jesus said to them, "Will you also go away?" {John 6:67}, with the implication, "Well, if you want to, go. All I need is the power of a living God!" What we need to learn is that when we rely on natural power we thereby forego supernatural power. Natural strength is not enough, and never will be, to do the job.

The reason why we try to depend upon it, though, is revealed in the next section. Beginning with Verse 2 and continuing through Verse 21 we have another section which details for us the offerings that were offered in connection with the ordaining of the priests.

First of all there were offerings for Aaron himself. In Verse 2, Moses said to Aaron,

**"Take a bull calf for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, both without blemish, and offer them before the LORD."**  
{Lev 9:2 RSV}

And in Verse 8 we are told,

**So Aaron drew near to the altar, and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself.** {Lev 9:8 RSV}

And, in Verse 12, he also killed the burnt offering which was for himself.

And then there were offerings for the people. Verses 3-4:

**And say to the people of Israel, "Take a male goat for a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both a year old without blemish, for a burnt offering, and an ox and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD, and a cereal offering mixed with oil; for today the LORD will appear to you."**  
{Lev 9:3-4 RSV}

These offerings were then sacrificed, as recounted in the rest of this section. So once again we run into the strange prominence of offerings and of blood which pervades this whole portion of the book.

Why does God constantly insist on all this blood? Why was nothing done apart from a sacrifice, a death? Well, you see, God is saying something to us. He is shouting at us! He wants to get across to us a fundamental truth regarding the power of the priesthood. It is that the resurrection power of a living God at work within his people can never be exercised apart from a previous death.

When these Israelites brought their offerings, these innocent animals whose blood had to be shed, whose lives had to be forfeited, they were expected to learn something from the sacrifices. These were not mere rituals they went through to placate an angry God so that they then could go on and live unchanged. They were not an umbrella of protection against the wrath of an angry deity. These offerings were expected to teach the offerer that something had to die within himself. They were not merely offered on behalf of the individual; they were the individual. That is what the offerer had to learn. An offering was a substitute which was accepted only because the person making the offering was identified with it. Something had to happen within him. That is what God is getting across. Of course this symbolizes the end of all the natural resources of life – and this is the key to the use of resurrection power.

On Friday I drove over to Monterey to take part in a Layman's Leadership Institute conference. Leaders from all over the country were invited, and one of the participants was an old friend of mine – many of you know him too – Dr. Don Moomaw. He is pastor of a church in Southern California. Don, you probably remember, was an All-American during his football career at UCLA. One speaker failed to show up on Friday so in his place the conference leader asked Don to share from his

own life and experience what God had taught him. I had never before heard him say what he told us, and it was very moving:

He said that, as a boy growing up, he had fallen in love with football. He played it all through high school and, since he had a large body, a sharp mind, and a dedicated spirit he became a very good player. He went on to college and in his sophomore year was named an All-American. Don told us what happened to him when he became an All-American.

Without realizing quite what was happening he found that every other American had an image of what an All-American was like, and he found himself trying to fill that image. An All-American is deemed a champion at everything he does – and Don said he tried to live up to that.

In his junior year he became a Christian. It wasn't very long before he felt himself drawn by God toward the ministry and so he began to prepare for it. Involved with other Christians, he entered into all their activities. But he found that he was still trying to live up to the image of an All-American – and an All-American is always ahead of everybody else. So if, in a meeting the people, talked about how many verses they had memorized, Don took note of the one who had memorized the most and then memorized 15 more than he. When they talked about how many hours they spent in prayer, he noted who had spent the most time and then spent an extra half hour more than he – because an All-American, you see, never falls short; he is always out ahead of everybody else.

He kept doing this, innocently, without realizing it, finding that he was putting on a facade and living up to an image which was not real. All through his early ministry he found himself always trying to fulfill the expectation of someone else.

(That is a familiar pattern, isn't it? We all live like that at times. We may not be All-Americans but we all have some image we feel is expected of us – some role we feel we must fulfill. And we try to do so, often quite innocently, not always to gain something for ourselves, but because it is expected of us. It is that which is characteristic of the natural life. And that is what God is telling us has to die, has to end.)

Don went on to tell us, in a very moving way, how God had taught him that truth – how, little by little, through humiliation and the experience of weakness and failure, God finally taught him to

stop living up to a facade and to give up trying to be an All-American in everybody's eyes, and just to be himself – to be content with God at work through him. He told us what relief it brought to his heart to find, finally, that he could just be what he was, that he could express his humanity in the way that God had put it together for him, filled with God's Spirit and saying what he himself felt led to say and not worrying about what someone else thought about it. And Don related in very simple yet eloquent terms how this had set him free.

That is what God is after. That is what he is talking about here. That is what this means! This is not just so much theological theory. These are not merely ancient rituals which are only an archaic curiosity to us today. God is trying to impart to us, clearly and definitely, a principle of life which will mean the difference between success and failure, between fulfillment and denial! What he is getting across to us is that the natural life must end!

Isn't that what Jesus says? Do you remember how he put it? "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone; but if it die it brings forth ... life," {cf, John 12:24 KJV}. Death precedes life. "All life that is worth living," God is saying, "comes out of death. It is never the other way around." We don't like that dying. We don't like losing that desire to fulfill an image. We want to fulfill our role. We don't like the idea that somebody might find out that we are not all they expect us to be, and so we resist this dying. But our Lord is telling us that this is the only way we will ever find life. Jesus says that if a man tries to hold on to his life, if he tries to save his life, he will lose it. If you try to hang on to life and squeeze all you can out of it – try to follow the world's rule: "Watch out for yourself, for 'old number one'; no one else is going to! Get yours while you can!" – you will find that life filters through your fingers. You can't hang on to it; it's gone, and you are left with an empty shell of all you tried to preserve. And how many are discovering that to be true these days! But, as Jesus said, if you throw it away, "If you lose your life for my sake," you will save it, {cf, Matt 10:39}. Just give it up and you will save it.

That is exactly what is being taught here, back in the Old Testament. This is not New Testament truth alone, at all. It is an unalterable principle of Christian life. God is saying that out of death



comes life. And when, on the basis of a death, we are ready to surrender this dependence upon our natural resources and strength, then we can lay hold of the supernatural strength of a living Lord acting in resurrection power – not only for us but for others as well when we minister to them.

Look at the result now, in Verse 22:

**Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting; and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. And fire came forth from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat upon the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. {Lev 9:22-24 RSV}**

What a dramatic scene! The whole camp of Israel, a million or more people, are somehow gathered at vantage points where they can observe what is happening in the open space before the door of the tabernacle, where the brazen altar is located. They watch Aaron and his sons kill these animals and put them on the altar and sprinkle the blood and pour it out. When everything is completed exactly as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron go together into the tabernacle. A hush falls on the whole assembly – no one knows what is going to happen.

Then Moses and Aaron come out again and they blessed the people. And suddenly the glory of the LORD appears. What was that? As best we can determine from other Scriptures it was a shining cloud of light, the Shekinah, a radiant glory of light which suddenly appeared and filled the whole area. Later it was to take up residence in the tabernacle, in the holy of holies where it was suspended over the ark of the covenant. But here it appears before all the people. And then a supernatural fire proceeds from it which consumes in a flash all the rest of the offerings upon the altar. A most impressive scene! No wonder the people fall on their faces and shout. This is a shout of victory, an expression of their sense of awe and wonder at the fact that the God of glory is in their midst.

Now, put this all together.

All of this is designed, as Paul says in First Corinthians 10, for our instruction. This is God's way of teaching us. What is the lesson? Well, there is a counterpart in our lives.

We are to be priests like these, and the objective of priesthood is to produce the glory of the LORD. That is what is manifest when the priesthood is operating properly. When all is done as God commands, then it works out to produce the glory of the LORD and the fire of God. The counterpart of that glory in our lives today is the beauty of the character of Jesus. The New Testament says that the Spirit of God is at work in our hearts to produce glory unto glory. And Paul, in Second Corinthians 4 says that the glory of God is found "in the face of Jesus Christ" {2 Cor 4:6 KJV}. So it is God's character, the character of Jesus, appearing in you and in me in our daily encounters with people, which is represented by the glory of the LORD here in Leviticus.

Last week in Illinois I spoke to a breakfast group on Saturday morning. I noticed a woman in the audience who had a patch covering her right eye and cheek and much of her nose. Yet the part of her face that I could see was radiant. I wondered who she was. At the end of the meeting she came up to me, and took my hand, and thanked me, saying how much she had enjoyed the time and how it had ministered to her. I noticed that she had some difficulty talking, but her face was just radiant.

Later on I met her husband and he told me her story. Three or four years ago she discovered that she had cancer of the eye. The eye was removed, but later the cancer reappeared and she had to have more surgery – this time removing part of the bone around the eye. Again she had to go back and this time they removed part of her nose and cheekbone. And a fourth time she had to return for further operations, and now practically half of her face is gone. But her husband told me of the joy in which this woman lives continually, an unbroken sense of joy which floods her being and which she has to express all the time. Though she has had plenty of struggles and times of resentment and bitterness, still God has led her into joy.

Her husband said, "You know, she wasn't like that before. She was a complaining woman who whined about everything. But God has used this disease to bring her to a sense of peace and has turned all that complaint and sorrow and malcon-

tentment into joy!” She was in the body-life service we had there last Sunday night and she shared something of the joyful spirit she now has. I felt led to ask her to pray for everybody in that congregation who was struggling with their circumstances, complaining and resisting and rejecting where God had put them, that they might learn that wonderful ministry of priesthood which changes circumstances into joy.

Remember that Jesus said to his disciples in the moment of their agony when they were facing the cross with him and dreading the loneliness that his departure would mean, “Your sorrows will be turned into joy,” {cf, John 16:20}. And it was predicted of Jesus in the book of Isaiah that he would come and bring “beauty for ashes” {Isa 61:3b KJV}, the oil of joy for the spirit of mourning, that his coming would turn these things into inner joy.

This is the purpose of his priesthood. And it is the purpose of your priesthood in the lives of others – that you might enter into their circumstances with sensitivity toward the individuals involved, and that the words you speak are able to release them from their outward despair and turn it around into inner joy and glory.

That is what God is saying to us.

There is no glory without this process of priesthood, but the purpose of priesthood is that the glory of the LORD might be manifest.

**Prayer:**

Father, we thank you for this time of teaching together. How deeply you have instructed us from your Word. We pray that we may understand it, take it seriously, and realize that this indeed is the joy of our ministry, and the joy of your ministry in our lives as well. Help us to stop resisting what you are doing with us. Help us to stop our complaining and our griping and our murmuring against your processes, and to accept this death, this dying to the feeding of our self-image, our desire to appear to be something that we are not, to fulfill a role and uphold a facade. Because we know that out of that death, Lord, will come your life. And we pray that your life will characterize us, that the glory of the Lord may be seen in us. We ask in your name, Amen.

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## Strange Fire

by Ray C. Stedman

In this vivid picture book of the Old Testament, Leviticus, we are learning the great truth which time and again in the course of history seems to be lost and then recovered again – this marvelous truth of the priesthood of every believer in Jesus Christ. At times down through the centuries, unfortunately, the idea of priesthood has become very distorted in the Christian church. Various groups have set aside bodies of men ordained as priests and treated as different from other people, as “super saints” who have a special “in” with God. But the New Testament teaches nothing like that. It instructs us that every believer in Jesus Christ is a priest and has a ministry, and that our whole purpose for existence as believers is to fulfill our priesthood.

When this truth is recovered it always has the fantastic power to change a whole civilization. Whenever this has been taken seriously by the church in any nation it has always resulted in a tremendous awakening, a fantastic change of pace, and a vast improvement in the quality of life. Institutions and organizations which have been committed to injustice and have been causing the deterioration of society have been challenged, and much of what, in the best sense, we call “civilization” has been recovered through the impact of this truth. When Martin Luther and the reformers discovered and spread this truth, and people began to appropriate it, the Reformation swept through Europe like wildfire and completely altered the course of European history. I am grateful that once again God in these days is calling the church, a sleeping, slumbering evangelical church, which has largely forgotten this truth – it has slipped through our fingers and we have lost its impact – God is calling us back to take this truth seriously once again.

That is what this book of Leviticus centers upon. It is teaching us what it means to be a priest,

to be a member of the royal priesthood {cf, 1 Pet 2:9} with which God has endowed this world and by which he intends to reach it. In our last study together, in Chapter 9, you remember that we saw the results of priesthood. When everything was done “as the LORD commanded” the result was a manifestation of the presence of God, a remarkable shining forth of the glory of the Lord. When Aaron, picturing Jesus Christ as the great high priest, and the sons of Aaron, joining with him in the priesthood, picturing us in our relationship with Christ, had done all that God had said and had fulfilled their priesthood as he had directed, then “the glory of the LORD” broke out in their midst. This is always the case. The “glory of the LORD” is the character of Jesus, the manifestation of his kind of humanity, present in our daily lives. Chapter 9, as we saw, concluded with a great scene of triumph. The Shekinah glory, a radiant cloud of light, suddenly appeared in the midst of the people of Israel and consumed the rest of the sacrifice in a flash of flame. The people, awed and amazed, shouted and fell on their faces, crying out in triumph.

But the amazing thing is that we now move immediately from that scene of triumph into a scene of tragedy. On the very day that this tremendous breakthrough occurred in the camp of Israel, tragedy strikes and a sudden and shocking manifestation of judgment occurs.

We have it recorded for us in the opening verses of Chapter 10:

**Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, and put fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered unholy fire before the LORD, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came forth**

**from the presence of the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. {Lev 10:1-2 RSV}**

The very same Shekinah which had consumed the sacrifice now flashes out again to destroy these two priests as they minister. What a shock this must have been to Aaron, to his remaining two sons, and to the whole camp of Israel.

You can imagine Aaron, watching with pride as these two boys of his carry out their duties as priests. They fill their censers with glowing coals, put incense upon them and go before the presence of the LORD as God had commanded. But then to Aaron's sore amazement a jet of fire reaches out from the cloud of glory and in a flash the boys are gone. He sees their singed, burned, charred bodies lying there on the floor. What do you think your reaction would have been if you had been part of this scene? The people were stunned, sobered by this manifestation.

As nearly as we can determine, what these boys did was to substitute a kind of incense different from that which God had commanded. It doesn't seem like very much of an offense, but it evoked immediate judgment from God and their lives were forfeit. I don't know why they did it. Maybe they didn't like the smell of the frankincense which God had specified and so they substituted some other kind of perfume – *Chanel No. 5*, or perhaps *My Sin*. But, for offering this, their lives were immediately taken.

Now, what is your reaction to that? I wish we could take a survey and ask you to reveal what you feel emotionally when you read this account. I would warrant that probably more than half of you have a sense of uneasiness about this episode and, if you were to probe deeply enough, a sense of resentment – even anger – against God for this kind of treatment. You feel that God is unfair. Why should he take the lives of these two men for such a trivial thing? I am sure that this was the reaction that Aaron and his sons felt, too, as they saw their brothers killed in this way. This is indicated in Verse 3, as we will see.

There are other stories in the Old Testament of the judgment of God in similar cases.

- For instance, Miriam, the sister of Aaron, indulged in a little seemingly rather trivial criticism and yet immediately God judged her with leprosy and she became white all over.

- A little later on is the story of Uzzah {2 Sam 6:3-8}, who, you remember, reached out to steady the ark of the covenant as David was returning it to Jerusalem. But as he touched it he dropped dead – just like that.
- There is also that story in the New Testament of Ananias and Sapphira {Acts 5:9-11} who, merely because they were pretending to a bit more dedication than they really possessed, died before the Lord!

Now why?

What do you think about these incidents?

Many of us, reading the Bible, tend to feel something – but then we pass on and never analyze it any further. This is why many people have come up with the idea that God, especially “the God of the Old Testament,” is a God of vengeful judgment, that he is a fierce and harsh tyrant, and that the slightest misstep is treated with severe judgment. We tend to think of God in that way despite the hundreds of passages in the Old Testament that reveal the tenderness of his heart and the abundance of his love and compassion. But this is because we read our Bibles so superficially. God is acting here just as much as a God of love as he is in any other part of the Bible. His nature is love. And he never deviates from what he has revealed himself to be. So this action must be in line with his nature and character of love. And, if we don't react to it as such, then there is something wrong with us. We need to stop and do some research to find out what is behind these acts which will help us to understand them as being actions of love and not harshness nor of fierceness.

There are several features in this passage which will help us:

The first that ought to be clearly noted is that this sin on the part of these two priests was not a sin of ignorance but one of **presumption**. They knew better. It wasn't that they were simply doing something at which they had no idea God would be offended. They had been told emphatically that he would be offended. If you look back at Exodus 30, you find in that chapter instructions for the construction of the altar of incense, where the incense was to be burned. In Verse 7 we are told,

**“And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall burn it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.” {Exod 30:7-8 RSV}**

And then in Verse 9,

**“You shall offer no unholy incense thereon,” {Exod 30:9a RSV}**

That is clear, isn't it? God had precisely said, “Be careful; do not offer the wrong kind of incense.” So when these priests did so it was a violation of the direct command of God. They were doing something against which God himself had forewarned them. God never visits with judgment anybody who is struggling in ignorance to try to find him, even though they do it the wrong way.

The New Testament, in speaking about the Lord Jesus, quotes from Isaiah 42 a beautiful verse which says, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench,” {Isa 42:3 RSV}. That is, God understands the heart of someone who is trying to find him, who is trying to do what is right, but doesn't know much about it. And he never, never, in any way, discourages him. He encourages him. He is patient, longsuffering, tender, compassionate, and understanding.

But the sin of these priests, obviously, is one of willful presumption. They took it for granted that God wouldn't care about it, even though he had said that he would. They gave no weight to his words, but insisted on their own way.

The second thing we need to note is that this sin was dealt with very severely because **it distorted God's revelation of himself**. In all these priestly sacrifices and rituals God is explaining something about himself so that we might learn what kind of God he is. But by their disobedience these priests were teaching wrong concepts about the being of God. That is why God judged them.

You remember that this is what Moses did. When he was leading them through the wilderness on the way to the land of Canaan the people of Israel needed water. And in obedience to God's word he smote the rock and water flowed forth. Later on the need arose a second time. This time God said not to smite the rock but to speak to it. But Moses,

in his anger against the people, smote it. And though in grace and mercy God allowed the water to come forth to the thirsting people of Israel, he said to Moses, “You have not sanctified me in the eyes of this people. You have not taught the truth about me. Therefore you will not enter the land,” {cf, Num 20:12}. God kept his word. Even though Moses was a mighty leader, and God used him greatly after that, still Moses had lost his right to enter the land.

Here we have the same sort of situation. These priests were supposed to be operating as the instruments, the functionaries, of God. And if they performed improperly they were misleading the people about God. That is the import of Verse 3. Evidently Aaron had begun to protest. Perhaps in his upset and anger at the loss of his two beloved sons he had started to cry out against God. But Moses stopped him with these words:

**“This is what the LORD has said, ‘I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace. {Lev 10:3 RSV}**

Aaron began to understand. You see, God had said that the incense to be offered was a peculiar kind – frankincense. Frankincense never yields its fragrance until it is burned. This is a very instructive lesson for us.

Incense, in the Scriptures, is always a picture of prayer. It is a beautiful picture. As the clouds of incense arose before the sanctuary in the evening air, they were a picture to all the people of how the prayers and thanksgiving of our hearts ascend before the God of glory. Incense is intended to be a picture of the prayer and commitment arising out of obedient and thankful hearts. And frankincense pictures, not merely thankfulness for the ordinary blessings of life, but, primarily, thankfulness for the hardships and the difficulties which burn us, the “fiery trials” we must pass through which Peter mentions in his first letter {1 Pet 4:12}, the ordeals of our lives. That is what God is trying to teach us – that it is a sweet, fragrant odor, a delight to him, to see a heart that is filled with praise and thanksgiving because of the trials we have passed through, a heart which has learned to rejoice in the fact that God has provided opportunity in these difficult times for us to manifest his character, and

has taught us great (though oftentimes painful) lessons about ourselves through them. This is what delights the heart of God. And this is what God is trying to teach by the prescribed ritual of offering frankincense each evening and morning.

But that lesson is marred and altered and we are taught a false idea about God by the offering of some other kind of perfume. If perfume is a picture of our happiness and our thankfulness then mere perfume of some other sort would teach that God exists only to make us feel good, that he is there only to produce a modicum of human happiness. The implication of that notion is that whatever makes us temporarily happy is from God. That is the philosophy which today, as you know, is destroying thousands, millions – the philosophy of hedonism, i.e., that anything which makes you happy is the reason for life, anything which produces any sort of temporary, passing pleasure must be right, because that is what God exists for and that is why we are here. That approach to life is what is destroying so many today! It encompasses the idea of getting a temporary thrill from a shot in the arm with a needle, or of losing a sense of the ugliness of life in an alcoholic haze, or of retreating to some round of transitory pleasure which helps you to forget reality, which makes you happy for awhile. And it rests, ultimately, upon the misconception that all these things must be right because God exists to provide them.

But that is a lie, a lie about God! That isn't what makes us happy. Happiness does not come from some momentary pleasure. It comes from a relationship of freedom, of giving oneself to the God who made us and thus being able to experience our true humanity for the very first time, really, as we learn to yield to God, to give up, to lose our lives and thus to find them again, as Jesus has said.

I don't think there is any more graphic picture in the whole Bible of what it means to offer strange fire before the Lord than that prayer which Jesus recorded for us in the New Testament – the prayer of the proud Pharisee. Remember how he stood and prayed: "Lord, I thank you that I'm not like other people, like all these unwashed publicans. I tithe every day, and I fast twice a week..." {cf, Luke 18:9-14}. His prayer is a recital of all that he has done for God and suggests how lucky God ought to feel to have him on his side.

That is what is meant by offering strange fire before the Lord – anything which reckons upon our own self-righteousness and forgets that life is given to us as a gift. Perhaps the most basic form of sin is ingratitude, this prevalent seizing of life as though we have an inalienable right to it, instead of receiving it as a gift from a Father's hand and giving thanks for it with that realization. What a tremendous text this is for Thanksgiving week! From it we can learn how to give thanks in such a way as will delight the heart of God. We can learn to rejoice in the fact that he has put us through trials and thus has given us an opportunity to manifest his life.

How are you ever going to show that God is the kind who returns good for evil unless somebody does evil to you? How will you ever get a chance to return good for evil unless somebody hurts you? How can you ever demonstrate the truth of the Scripture: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" {Matt 5:10a RSV}, unless somebody persecutes you? You see, the moment that happens you have a chance to manifest the life of Jesus, the character which delights the heart of God. How are you ever going to learn the disciplines of life which break down your self confidence and your trust in human resources, and which teach you to rely wholly upon a God who releases from within the strength you need, unless you are put into trials where human resources are not any longer adequate, unless you are pushed out beyond your depth? How are you ever going to learn this unless that happens? This is the great lesson that God is seeking to impart to us.

How many verses of the New Testament say the same thing to us? "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials," James tells us {cf, Jas 1:2}, because that is an opportunity to delight the heart of God by the reaction you show. And that is our priesthood. But if it is distorted, if we act as though we can give thanks to God only when things go right, if we can find it in our hearts to be grateful only when things are breaking our way, well, this is what anybody ought to do. Even non-Christians, pagans, can react that way. But God is looking for those hearts which have genuinely learned to rejoice in the trials that he has sent, and the pain we have gone through, the difficulties and disappointments, and the circumstances of hardship. Have you heard the little poem that goes:

God has not promised skies always blue,  
flower-strewn pathways all our lives through.  
God has not promised sun without rain,  
joy without sorrow, peace without pain,  
But God has promised strength for the day,  
rest for the laden, light for the way,  
Grace for the trials, help from above,  
unfailing sympathy, undying love.

When you bow your head over your Thanksgiving table, are you going to give thanks just for the adequate supply of food and clothing, the roof over your head, the job you have, and the family around you – just for the blessings of life? Or can you also thank God from a genuinely rejoicing heart that he has taught you some deep truths through painful circumstances, for the fact that you have had to go through some hardships and some crushing disappointments but that out of them you have seen yourself in a new way, you have learned how to rest and to draw upon the resources of an abundant Savior in your life? Well, that is when God's heart begins to swell with pride and gladness – when the frankincense goes up before him as a sweet savor in which he delights. But this is what was being twisted and distorted by the whole performance of these two careless and thoughtless priests.

The third thing we need to notice about this episode is that **this judgment is exemplary**, i.e. that God has made an example of them this once and that he never does this again. This is not something which happened every time a priest violated any regulation. It only happened once – at the beginning of the priesthood. Similarly, though the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was common among Christians in the early church, and has been common ever since, still God has never visited sudden physical death like that again. God is teaching a lesson by this action, and so he does it only once.

You can read that later on in the priesthood of Israel the priests did many very terrible things before the altar, but God never killed them for it. In the days of the Maccabees there was a time when they actually even offered swine's blood on the altar, the blood of an unclean animal, which was a horrendous thing to do. And yet there is no record of God's sudden judgment in that case.

But it is important that it happened at least this one time. For this is an example and therefore it is a manifestation of God's love and concern. He is

trying to stop this kind of thing from happening again, and he is giving fair warning of the eventual consequences to anyone presumptuous enough to sin deliberately in this way.

In reading an account of the terrible atrocities which occurred at My Lai, I was struck by a remark attributed to one veteran soldier regarding the passive attitudes of many senior officers toward cruelty to prisoners, and killing of civilians, and other atrocities committed by the armed forces. He said this:

This stuff would stop if we'd hang a couple of senior commanders. If it's no longer condoned then it will cease. If you don't tell a soldier what's right, then he thinks whatever is tacitly condoned is what you want – and that's what he does.

That is the way we human beings work. Unless an issue is vividly, dramatically, openly, symbolically made clear to us, we'll go right on and do the wrong thing. So God is stopping that, arresting it with his judgment at this point. But he really wants us to learn to refrain for the sake of his glory, not out of fear for our lives, so he only judges in this way once.

One final thing we need to remember will help us to understand this whole affair in a different light. There is **no implication here of eternal condemnation for Nadab and Abihu**. This occurrence doesn't mean they are lost. I have no doubt in my mind that these two young priests were with the Lord in glory immediately. God took them home – not because he was going to condemn them to hell, but only because they had violated their ministry. He called them home as an example to others in order that they in turn should not violate their ministries in the same way – especially in the reality of which what these priests were doing is merely the symbol.

What is the corresponding way in which you and I violate our ministries? How do we offer strange fire before God in our priesthood? We do it whenever we depart from the word of the Lord as it pertains to the advice we give others as we exercise our priesthood. These two priests did what the LORD commanded them not to do. And that is what we too often do:

For example, if somebody comes to us and asks for help and advice because they have been

mistreated and personally insulted, and if you or I say, as we are so tempted to say, “Well, if I were you I’d punch him in the nose!” – that would be offering strange fire before the LORD, wouldn’t it? That isn’t what God has said. He says, “Return good for evil.” Now, I don’t mean that there is never a time when it may be appropriate for us to be angry and even to exercise physical violence on behalf of someone else, but never on our own behalf. This is what God calls us to refrain from doing. What God is teaching us here is that the service we offer as a priest must be only that which is commanded of the Lord, and nothing else.

The next section of the passage reveals a very human reaction on the part of Aaron and his two remaining sons. We read,

**And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel, the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, “Draw near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp.” So they drew near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, “Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not rend your clothes, lest you die, and lest wrath come upon all the congregation; but your brethren, the whole house of Israel, may bewail the burning which the LORD has kindled. And do not go out from the door of the tent of meeting, lest you die; for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you.” And they did according to the word of Moses. {Lev 10:4-7 RSV}**

You can well imagine that they would! It must have been a tremendous struggle for them to stand by and watch their relatives summoned to go in and pick up these charred bodies and carry them out for burial. Naturally their hearts were torn. Their loss was sudden and shocking. These were their brothers, Aaron’s sons, and they loved them. Their natural reaction would have been to take the rest of the day off, at least, and to mourn them and weep for them. But Moses said, “No, don’t do that. You can’t do that. God won’t let you. If you do that you will die. God wants you to stick right with your priesthood despite the feelings of your own hearts.” For God knew what we usually do not recognize immediately in circumstances like this –

that out of the shock, out of the pain, out of the anguish of heart would come a new power, a new efficiency, and a new sense of purpose for the priesthood. So he would not let them off. Instead he led Moses to say, “Let the rest of Israel bewail them, but you stay right on the job. And don’t you quit!”

Have you ever felt like quitting? I have, lots of times. If I had been in these two remaining boys’ shoes I would have thought to myself, “How do you get out of this outfit? I never counted on anything like this. If you’re not careful to do what God says, this can happen. I’m quitting!” But God sent Moses to warn them, “You can’t quit!” Many times I have come to the place where I’ve felt like that. “I don’t want to help others anymore, Lord. It’s too great a responsibility. I want out. Just leave me alone and let me live by myself.” But God says, “No.” He knows that my priesthood, and your priesthood, will be all the richer because of his discipline. That is why we read in Hebrews 12, “Despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him,” {cf, Heb 12:5 KJV}. Don’t shrink from it or feel that it is too much for you to be expected to bear. For out of the pain of our heart will come a clearer understanding, a deeper compassion, and a stronger, more realistic word of help to someone else. God knows that, and so he won’t let us off.

God is an utter realist. He deals with life the way it is. It is we who are victims of illusions, delusions, and fantasies. We sometimes think that these matters are unimportant or trivial, that we can just toss off a word of advice according to our feelings of the moment. But God labors continually to impress upon us that the only wisdom we can count on as being realistic and genuinely helpful must be that which arises out of the principles taught in the Word of God.

I hope you take these words seriously, because God means them seriously. He is not joking when he says to us today that each believer in Jesus Christ is called to a priesthood. For some reason we have a tendency to blind our eyes and shut our ears to this idea and to say “Well, that belongs to somebody else.” No! It doesn’t! It belongs to you! You have a priesthood and God has called you to it. There are no exceptions. I am no more a priest than you are. If I am in the ministry, so are you in the ministry. If I have a responsibility to help my brother, my sister, whomever I meet along the way,



so have you. Your priesthood is to be exercised right where you are – in your office, in your shop, at school, at home, with your children, with your neighbors and your friends.

When God looks at you in your busy business office he isn't noting what you often are noting. He isn't concerned, primarily, about what you are likely to be concerned about. You are concerned about getting the work done, and doing it acceptably enough that they'll keep handing you a check at the end of the month. God doesn't worry about that, particularly. He wants your work done well. That's part of your ministry. But the main thing that God cares about, and what he is really watching for, is how you react to the people you work with. What are you doing for them? How are you responding to the way they treat you? That is what God is watching for. And that is your opportunity for priesthood, for ministry.

One of these days God will call us all to account for our priesthood, and he'll ask us, "What did you do in this situation, and that? How did you respond? Here was an opportunity for you to be a priest and what did you do?" What are you going to say? What am I going to say? God takes this very seriously. He lays this responsibility upon us, and he won't let us off, no matter if our heart is breaking and we are going through pressures and trials and problems. He says, "You can't quit. I've put you there to deepen your impact, to increase your opportunity, to broaden your ministry, and I won't let you off." Out of this discipline will have to come a deeper, richer commitment, and a better understanding of the word of the Lord, and of what we can say to people that will help them, so that we will no longer be content just to pass along some piece of advice off the top of our head which merely reflects the philosophy of the world. That is the priesthood to which God is calling us.

We are going to reserve the rest of the chapter for our next study. In it there are some very interesting and helpful suggestions on how to carry out

our priesthood, and what to avoid. And the chapter ends with a marvelous manifestation of the tenderness and the grace of God. I hope that you won't carry away from this study any sense that God is a vengeful, strange, fearsome Being. He is to be respected. We can't trifle with him in these spiritual matters, just as we can't ignore the laws of nature and do whatever we feel like doing. God, of course, is sovereign in both. But, on the other hand, his every action, even this kind of action, is an action of love. It is an attempt to arrest further destruction and to stop it before it begins, and thus to keep us from hurting ourselves and harming others in the process.

### Prayer:

Our Father, as we wait before you we, too, feel a sense of awe, a twinge of fear perhaps, a touch of apprehension in our hearts when we consider that you are this kind of God – an utter realist. You always deal realistically with everything. So Lord, we pray that this will help us to understand that we are not playing games in life, that being a Christian is not a game either, and that the priesthood is a very serious matter to which we are called. It involves us deeply, and there is no way out. Our responsibility then is to be what you want us to be, Lord. Help us to do so. Help us to understand that you are loving and understanding, and that you are willing to help us at any time. If in our foolishness and ignorance we blindly walk off into dead-end streets you are willing to help us back, Lord. But you will not put up with deliberate refusal to take your word seriously. By that we always cause ourselves difficulty. Help us to understand all this with proper perspective and balance. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Instructions to Priests

by Ray C. Stedman

I never tire of the excitement and the joy of seeing Christians discover the fact of their priesthood. Many people have been church members for years yet have never understood this great truth. But then God leads them to discover that they can do more than merely come to church and sit there and pay the bills. They learn that they have been constituted priests unto God and that they have been equipped by the Holy Spirit with gifts which enable them to minister wherever they are, whether to Christians or to non-Christians. And when they catch on to this and experience the power that God has supplied to them through the Holy Spirit they become simply elated about what God can do in their lives! It is a great joy to see this kind of truth hit with an electric excitement and to watch people being changed by it.

Leviticus is the book of the priesthood. God is teaching us by means of these types, these pictures and shadows of the Old Testament, what our priesthood means for us today. You remember that in our last study we looked at the opening part of Chapter 10 and saw that this priesthood is no joke, that God takes it very seriously. He has given us careful instructions as to how to live and act as priests. He especially wants us to avoid the things that he says are dangerous. This is what is brought out so clearly in the story of Nadab and Abihu, the two older sons of Aaron, who carelessly assumed that as priests they could do whatever they wanted to do, that since they were priests they could interject their own ideas of how a priest ought to function. And when they did this, we are told, there flashed forth out of that cloud of Shekinah glory

which was the symbol of the presence of God a flame of fire which consumed them in their tracks and destroyed them, and thus they died suddenly before God in the sanctuary. This stunned and sobered the people of Israel. It was God's way of impressing upon them the fact that the priesthood is extremely important.

I wonder if we, here today, have any idea at all of how terribly important this priesthood is which God has committed to us as believers. This world is going through terrible struggle and is in a critical state, as we well know. I don't have to describe it to you. You know how confused and horribly broken it is. And the reason that we are going through such desperate conditions, and that society is literally falling apart at the seams, is the lack of a priesthood. The church has not been what it ought to be. Individual Christians have neglected this priesthood which is committed to them. As a result there has been no salt with savor in society and so it is corrupting at a fearful rate.

This past week I was in Fort Smith, Arkansas, where Jim Gordon and I spoke at two high schools. The student body of the first was entirely white, and there we received an ovation as we reported on the California scene and on how God is working in various ways through the Jesus Movement here on the west coast. The students were very excited about this. The second school was predominantly white but there were about two hundred fifty blacks there too. We noticed a tremendous difference in atmosphere. As we were hurrying down the hall with them on the way to the assembly all the white students were jostling and talking and laughing as

high school kids will. But all the black students were lined up along the walls. They weren't saying a word and were not responding to our attempts to smile at them or to speak to them. They just stood there – sullen, glowering, defiant, angry. It was obvious they were united in this and working together. And it was distressing to see that there was no salt at work in their lives, no priesthood reaching out to them with love and understanding to provide a vent for all the pressures and problems that were seething in their hearts and lives. At the end of the meeting that morning, though the white students gave us very loud applause, the few blacks who came into the assembly did not join in. And afterward, as we were walking down the hall, one of the local men who was with us was knocked down deliberately by a black student. So it was obvious that racial tensions were building to a tremendous pitch in this high school. Yet the whites were largely blind to it and unaware of it! I tried to point out some of the danger signs to them and to warn them that they could no longer ignore these people but must recognize that they are human beings who have problems which need an outlet and a remedy. They need somebody to reach out to them in love. And I could sense so strongly the desperate need for priesthood in that situation! This is what God has called us to, in order that these middle walls of partition between races and classes will be broken down by the ministry of men and women possessed with the Spirit of God – not great preachers, but common, ordinary, plain Christian people, just like you and me. These are the ones who have the priesthood.

Now, in Chapter 10, we come to three further **instructions to priests** which are very insightful and helpful. Following the account of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu we read, in Verses 8-11:

**And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, “Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”**  
{Lev 10:8-10 RSV}

There you notice two great privileges of ministry which priests enjoy:

- The first is *to discriminate between the clean and the unclean*, between the holy and the common. Of course in the ancient priesthood this meant to distinguish between animals which were marked as clean and those which were declared unclean, and between sacred vessels, buildings, etc., and those which were for common use. When this is lifted to the level of our priesthood, the spiritual level, it means to discriminate between that which merely feeds the natural life and that which improves a person's spiritual relationship, deep in his inner heart. And it means to distinguish between that which is harmful and that which is harmless.

That is not easy to do! It takes a very sharp eye and discriminating mind to be able to tell the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. You remember that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that though by that time those men ought to have been teachers, yet they needed somebody to teach them again the first principles of God's word because they were unable to judge between the right and the wrong, between the clean and the unclean. This is what a priesthood is for.

- And, second, it is *to teach the truth*. It is to unveil reality. It is to tear down all the illusions under which people live and to demolish all the lies and fantasies with which society is saturated, and to expose the way life really is. That is the business of priests – to teach the truth about life as the God of truth himself has revealed it. That is what these priests were to do. They were to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the LORD had spoken to them through Moses. And that is our job – to unveil the truth and to help people to see and understand it.

You see, the first ministry corrects what is wrong; the second replaces it with what is right. That is what is so desperately needed in society today. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 2, he closes a section about the spiritual equipment of the believer by saying, "The spiritual man judges all things [discriminates between all things], but is himself to be judged by no one,"

{1 Cor 2:15 RSV}. And then he says perhaps the most amazing, astounding thing this apostle ever wrote. He says that when we are judging all things on the basis of an understanding of the Word of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit, “We have the mind of Christ,” {1 Cor 2:16b RSV}. That is, we are looking at the world as Christ sees it, at the way it really is, and thus we become utter realists. That is the job of a priest – your job, my job – to take this truth and to set it before people in such a way that they can see the truth about themselves and about life.

They need this ministry in so many areas these days:

- Think of how many people today are all mixed up in the area of sex. How little understood is this great, driving force which motivates so much of our thinking and living! How easily it is twisted and distorted and perverted! That which was a great gift from God to man, designed to be beautiful and powerful and healing, has become sordid and nasty and perverted – and destructive to human relationships, destroying the very ones who are seeking to find through it a relationship of love. But its rightful use will enhance and glorify and beautify life. And how much the world needs to hear the truth about sex, taught from the word of God and not from the lies of men!
- Think of how much help we need in the area of understanding material values. So many people, even many Christians, seem to miss the truth that things don’t satisfy. I find so many people today who are suffering from what someone has well called *destination sickness*, the malady of having everything you’ve always wanted to have, but not wanting anything you’ve gotten. You’ve arrived, but you don’t want it when you get there. That is the emptiness of our day and it so desperately calls for the exercise of a priesthood which will tell the truth about what God can do and about the needs he can meet.
- Think of the need for truth in the area of marital relationships. I had an interesting experience on the plane yesterday coming back from Arkansas. I was working on the concluding phases of this message and I was studying from the Bible. A stewardess came by and said,

“What are you doing?” I said, “I’m studying.” She said, “What are you studying?” And I said, “I’m studying the Bible.” “Oh,” she said, “that’s very interesting. What are you studying about?” I said, “About life, and about you.” She said, “What do you mean?” “Well,” I said, “tell me a little about yourself, and I’ll tell you.” She told me, among other things, that she was married. I happened to have in my briefcase a copy of one of my printed messages, entitled *What Every Husband Should Know*. I handed it to her and said, “Why don’t you give this to your husband? There is also one for wives. I don’t have it with me but I’ll be glad to send it to you if you’ll give me your address.” She took the copy and went on about her work. After a while I looked up from my studies, and there she stood – with two other stewardesses. She said, “You know, I read a few pages from your pamphlet and it is great! I want my husband to have this very much – he needs it! And these other girls want to get copies too.” So I ended up with the names and addresses of all these stewardesses and a chance to send them these messages. Now, that is the work of the priesthood, exactly! It doesn’t have to be anything official. You can minister right where you live and work. And that is exactly what this passage is talking about – the need for the dissemination of the truth about God in ways that people will accept and understand and welcome – telling it abroad the way it is.

You notice also that there was one thing the priests must not do. Verse 8 says, “The LORD spoke to Aaron [evidently directly, not through Moses this time], and said, ‘Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations.’” Now, don’t misunderstand that. This is not a women’s temperance message. The Bible never says that anything is wrong with wine or strong drink except in the abuse of it, in its use to excess. But it does say, consistently all the way through, that any degree of drunkenness, any getting high, any lack of control is always regarded as wrong because it destroys our humanity to some extent.

The priests were warned against this particularly when they went into the tent of meeting, the

tabernacle, for ministry. But don't take these Old Testament injunctions which were literal in the realm of the physical and carry them over literally into that same realm for us. If that were valid we would still have to be killing animals as did these ancient priests. But we know that animal sacrifice is a picture of the death of Christ on our behalf. Similarly, here the forbidding of the priests to drink wine or strong drink is a picture of something on the spiritual level in our lives. It signifies that we should avoid on the spiritual level that which wine and strong drink do on the physical level.

What is that?

Well wine and strong drink, of course, tend to excite nature. They arouse the flesh, and distort judgment as a result. So anything which arouses our passions, our flesh, in the exercise of our priesthood, with its necessity of discriminating and making judgments between what is harmful and what is harmless, is forbidden to us lest it destroy our ability to judge – both for ourselves and for others to whom we may be ministering.

How greatly this warning is needed! For instance, I have seen at least a dozen situations down through the years in which Christians, with the best of intentions, have gotten involved in shady financial deals, in trying to make a lot of money quickly, justifying it to themselves on the grounds that they would be better able to support missionaries or to contribute more to the church. But, despite their sincerity, in the process they have done things which were downright illegal and clearly wrong, things with which a worldly man would have had nothing to do because he would have recognized them for what they were. But their own cupidity, their own covetousness and desire for enrichment, blinded their minds to the situation and dulled their senses so that they couldn't distinguish right from wrong. This is what is forbidden to us here.

I have seen Christians, young and old, trying to help someone involved in a sexual problem. Sex is a powerful drive and those who try to help in this area must be very careful because they too can have their passions aroused. And many times Christians have not been careful and have fallen into the very problem they were trying to help correct. This is what God is warning against. Don't get yourself involved in a situation to such a degree that you lose the ability to be objective and to distinguish which is right and which is wrong.

The next section deals with **the sources of the priests' strength**:

**And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons who were left, "Take the cereal offering that remains of the offerings by fire to the LORD, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy; you shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, from the offerings by fire to the LORD; for so I am commanded." {Lev 10:12-13 RSV}**

This section, from Verse 12 to Verse 15, tells us where strength can be derived to meet these heavy demands for objectivity in the decisions we have to make. The cereal offering, as we have already seen, is a picture of the humanity of Jesus, his perfect manhood, man just as God intended man to be, with which we can identify because he was tempted in every point like as we are. He knows exactly what we go through. He experienced every pressure, every single temptation that we undergo.

But do you notice where they were to eat this? In only one place. They were to eat it beside the altar, right beside the place where the animals were put to death, as a reminder of that fundamental principle which runs all through Scripture: he who loses his life shall save it, but he who tries to hang on to it shall lose it. That is the basic law of life. If you try to hang onto your humanity, try to protect it and keep it for yourself, and are concerned only about what pleases you or does something for you, you will lose it. It will wither and die and you will turn hard and callous and cold and cruel. But if you fling it away, give it away to others, and are ready to invest it in somebody else's life and welfare, let it die, in other words, you will save it and it will be a joy to you.

There are **two other sources of strength** given here. Look at Verses 14-15:

**"But the breast that is waved and the thigh that is offered you shall eat in any clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you; for they are given as your due and your sons' due, from the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the people of Israel. The thigh that is offered and the breast that is waved they shall bring with the offerings by fire of the fat, to wave for a wave offering before the LORD, and it shall**

**be yours, and your sons' with you, as a due for ever; as the LORD has commanded.** {Lev 10:14-15 RSV}

Notice the emphasis on the continuity of this provision. This is something which is available all the time, forever. We have seen already the meanings of these two portions of the animals. The breast is a symbol of the affections of Christ, of his love for us. The thigh symbolizes his strength, his power on our behalf. What this is saying, again, is that when you get discouraged and feel as if you are not accomplishing anything, and you are beaten down and it doesn't seem as if anybody is taking any notice, you are to remind yourself of the love the Lord Jesus has for you, to remember that he cares about you and accepts you and is with you, and that his love never changes. You are precious and dear to him. That is feeding upon the breast.

And then when you feel that you can't do something, that the demands upon you are too great, that you don't have the power to respond as you ought in some situation – perhaps you know you ought to love someone, but the person is so difficult to love – then you are to remind yourself that Christ's life is in you and that his strength is yours. If you will just step out and act upon it, it will be there to supply you with whatever power you need. That is feeding upon the thigh. Notice that both of these are to be eaten anywhere, not just at the altar but anywhere you need them. This is where the sources of strength lie.

The final section of this passage deals with a **problem which arose**. Verses 16-20:

**Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it was burned! And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron who were left, saying, "Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded." And Aaron said to Moses, "Behold, today they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD; and yet such things as these have be-**

**fallen me!** [He is referring to the death of his two sons.] **If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been acceptable in the sight of the LORD?" And when Moses heard that, he was content.** {Lev 10:16-20 RSV}

Do you see the problem here?

There were two kinds of sin offering, as explained in the law of the sin offering in Chapter 6:

- In one the blood was to be carried into the inner sanctuary, into the holy place, and there it was to be sprinkled on the horns of the golden altar of fragrant incense. That was required as a picture of the depravity of man's evil. And because of that depravity no part of the animal was to be eaten but it was all to be taken outside the camp and burned. Only God could consume it, so deep is man's evil.
- But there was another kind of sin offering in which the blood was sprinkled on the horns of the brazen altar in the outer court. There the flesh of the animal was to be eaten by the priests as a picture of their understanding of the nature of their evil and as a token of their acceptance of the forgiveness of God.

This offering was of the second kind. The blood had not been brought into the sanctuary and so Moses said, "You should have eaten this meat! Why didn't you do it?" And he is afraid lest the judgment of God consume the rest of these priests. But Aaron explains. He says, "Two of my sons have sinned. And even though a sin offering had been offered this very morning, yet they died. Evidently there is some depth of depravity here that we don't understand but which has taken their lives. Therefore it seemed to me that the LORD would not be pleased if I ate the sin offering. So we have treated it as though the blood were sprinkled before the golden altar, and the body of this animal has been burned in its entirety."

When Moses heard that, he understood. He realized then that Aaron had gone deeper than the letter of the law; he had understood the intent of it. He had understood what God is after in these sacrifices and rituals and ceremonies, had recognized that there was a matter of deeper concern here. And so God, mercifully, does not exercise any judgment here because Aaron has pressed beyond

the letter to the deep intent of the law. And Moses is content with that.

This attitude always pleases God. You see, God is really not at all interested in our ritual. That is something we need so desperately to understand. He is not impressed by the fact that you come to church every Sunday, if that is all you do. He doesn't care the least bit that you stand and sing and pray and witness, or whatever you do, if your heart is not in it. Those activities, in themselves, do not make you any better in his sight. What he is after is what happens in the heart.

Listen to these words of David from the 51st Psalm, written after David himself had fallen into deep and dark sin, the double sins of murder and adultery. In Verses 15-17 of this great Psalm he cries out,

**O Lord, open thou my lips,  
and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.  
For thou hast no delight in sacrifice;  
were I to give a burnt offering, thou  
wouldst not be pleased.  
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken  
spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou  
wilt not despise. {Psa 51:15-17 RSV}**

That is what Aaron saw, and so Moses was content to let the letter of the law be violated because the intent of it was so beautifully fulfilled.

And that is what God is after with us. He doesn't want any kind of religious folderol. He doesn't care about that. During this Christmas season he is not at all impressed by decorations and crèches and momentary sentimental remembrances

of the reason for the celebration of Christmas. What he wants is a heart that is open, responsive, honest, and obedient before him. With that God is greatly pleased. That delights his heart.

With that as our preparation, we will move right to the table of the Lord. Remember, this communion ceremony is absolutely useless unless it reflects the condition of your heart, unless you are looking beyond the elements of the bread and wine to the Lord Jesus, and to who he is and what he did. If you cannot stay you may leave now if you like. If there are those of you here who are not Christians yet, we invite you to become Christians right now. Then you may freely participate, because this is for Christians. In your heart just open your life to Christ and he will enter in, and you will belong at his table then.

In closing I would like to share with you these beautiful words, authorship unknown:

Ah, says the Holy Spirit, you cannot do it; just withdraw; come out of it and sit down, and as you sit there behold Him, look at Him. Don't try to be like Him, just look at Him. Instead of trying, just be occupied with Him. Forget about trying to be like Him. Don't let that fill you mind and heart, let Him fill it. Just behold Him, look upon Him through the Word. Come to that Word for one purpose, and that is to meet the Lord. Not to get your mind crammed full of things about the sacred Word, but come to it to meet the Lord, the living Word. Make it a medium, not of biblical scholarship, but of fellowship with Christ. Behold the Lord!

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## The Need for a Standard

by Ray C. Stedman

Our study this morning is very appropriate to the season we are approaching, for during this holiday time if you are like me you are greatly concerned about what you are going to eat – how much and what effect it is going to have upon you. I am determined to win, if I can, the “Nobelly Prize” for abstinence this year.

This is the subject of Leviticus – God’s concern over what his people eat. It is wonderfully instructive that God was so involved with his people that he was concerned about every minute detail of their lives, even down to what they ate, what they wore, where they went, and what they did. All of this shows God’s similar concern for us at the spiritual level.

We come in Chapter 11 to a new subdivision of Leviticus. Here we see another of these basic human needs which must be met in our lives and which God meets through Christ. In our study of the five offerings which open the book we learned that we need a way to satisfy certain fundamental urges of our lives: We need love, joy, peace, forgiveness, and responsibility toward one another. All these were met in typological fashion by these offerings which point to Christ. So we learned that the way humans are to meet these needs is by a substitute, by dependence on the power of another at work. There isn’t any other way. If you are lacking in any of these areas, there is one provision for your need to be met, and only one: Jesus Christ, our great substitute. Then we learned of our need for a priest, to explain truth to us, to enlighten us, to support and comfort us, and to help us in our intellectual and emotional problems.

In this section that we come to today we face the need for a standard, a measuring stick by which we can distinguish between things which are harmful and those which are harmless, between right and

wrong and good and evil. That is not easy to do, as you well know. This section reveals the realism of Scripture. How realistically it deals with life!

Certain modern philosophies of today tell us that there is really nothing harmful, that it is only our perverted thinking which makes things wrong, and that if we would but change our thinking then anything and everything is right. The contention is that all activities and associations are fundamentally right; it is only the situation that makes any of them possibly wrong. But you don’t find anything like that in Scripture.

The Bible tells us that we are living in a world where truth and error are inextricably mixed and that you cannot easily tell one from the other – that there are snares and traps all around us. Life confirms this. People we know are constantly falling into traps before they are aware of it. Suddenly they wake up to find themselves captured. We just prayed for a young man who fell into the trap of LSD and woke up to find himself a prisoner of it. And the Bible tells us that the world is filled with the teaching of demons, with concepts and ideas which are dangerous and deadly – yet they don’t appear that way. They appear to be innocent and blithe, leading to happiness. How do you tell the difference before it is too late, before you have to learn through sorrows and sadness? Well, this is what this chapter is given to us for. It provides a marvelous way to establish guidelines and to recognize practical tests by which we can tell the difference between truth and error.

God is very concerned in the realm of what people eat. With these Israelites, his concern was expressed on the physical level – he actually regulated their diet. In this chapter, you have dietary laws distinguishing clean animals from unclean, and various sanitary practices are included as well.



It would be very wrong for us not to recognize that these dietary regulations and sanitary laws did indeed operate to preserve Israel from diseases and epidemics which were rife in the nations around them. God kept his people physically clean through many of these regulations.

Many of these practices we will be looking at here have a very commonsense basis in the maintenance of health. There is an excellent book available, called *None of These Diseases*, by Dr. S. I. McMillen. In it, he shows, in a very charming way, how many of the illnesses and ailments of our present life could be avoided if we would simply follow some of these practical, commonsense regulations which God taught his people in the Old Testament. But not all of the regulations were for that reason.

There was nothing wrong with many of the animals which were prohibited to the Israelites as food. They were prohibited only because the prohibition taught a symbolic lesson. This is brought out in the book of Acts, in the story of Peter's dream on the housetop before his visit to Cornelius in Caesarea {Acts 10:9-16}. He saw a sheet let down from heaven with all kinds of animals on it, clean and unclean, many of which Peter, in all his Jewishness, had never even considered eating! Many of these were the creeping and crawling things which were forbidden the Israelites. But, you remember, God's command was: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat," {Acts 10:13 RSV}. And Peter said, "Lord, I'm shocked at you, that you would propose that I should ever do anything unclean like this!" {cf, Acts 10:14}. God's correcting rebuke to Peter is very helpful; he said, "Peter, what God has cleansed, don't you call unclean," {cf, Acts 10:15}. Many of these animals, therefore, were perfectly all right for food, but were prohibited solely because they taught a symbolic lesson. It is this symbolism that we are interested in. What is meant by these distinctions?

A further word of introduction may be helpful. There are four spheres from which food can be taken:

1. First, there were the animals which walk on the earth – the normal and natural food of man. Yet some of them were to be considered unclean and others clean.
2. Then there were those animals which come from the sea, the seafood.

3. There was food from the heavens – the birds and winged insects.
4. Finally, there were animals which crawl or creep along in close contact with the ground.

These four divisions have a direct correspondence with something in our lives: They mark the areas from which food for our inner life can come. What the Israelites were forbidden to eat on the physical level, we are forbidden to take in on the spiritual and emotional level of our life – the inner life. There are clean and unclean ideas and concepts and spheres of knowledge which we need to distinguish today. These laws will help us greatly, because the basic principles run right through both levels of life. Let me show you what I mean.

The **first sphere** to be considered is that of the normal animals which were widely available for food to the Israelites, Verses 1-8:

**And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Say to the people of Israel, These are the living things which you may eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. Nevertheless among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. And the rock badger [really the coney, although it is not to be confused with the English rabbit – its scientific name is Hyrax Syriacus], because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. And the hare, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you." {Lev 11:1-6 RSV}**

Incidentally, this verse has been the butt of a great deal of ridicule by the skeptics of the Bible who say that this shows that the Bible doesn't know anything about natural science, because rabbits and hares do not chew the cud. It is true that they don't ruminate like cows and other ruminants. But it has recently been discovered that they do have another process, somewhat similar, by which food is redigested, called *refection*. And so the Bible is right, after all. Some of us never doubted it, but those of you who did can now be at peace.

Continuing in Verse 7:

**“And the swine, because it parts the hoof and is clovenfooted but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean to you.” {Lev 11:7-8 RSV}**

Now, why these restrictions? Notice that those animals which were permitted had two characteristics. And they had to have both characteristics – not just one, but both. They had to chew the cud, and they had to divide the hoof. They were taken from the normal range of animal food, and so they correspond to the normal area of feeding for the believer.

What are we to feed upon? What is our normal area for taking in knowledge and insight and understanding and revelation about life? It is the Word of God, isn't it? Over and over in the Scriptures themselves we are told that the Word is our food. Jesus himself said, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,” {cf, Matt 4:4}. It is likened to milk and to strong meat and to bread, and we are to feed upon this Word. But we are to feed upon only that part of it which has been tested by both these two processes which are described here in the symbols of the chewing of the cud and the dividing of the hoof.

What do these mean?

1. What is the chewing of the cud a picture of? If you have ever watched an animal that chews its cud you know that you have before you a beautiful picture of the art of meditation, of taking in knowledge and ideas and concepts, and tentatively swallowing them undigested at first, but then bringing them up again to re-think, re-chew, work over again. Thus there is proposed for us in the handling of the Scriptures a method for distinguishing between that which is wisdom from above and that which is wisdom from below, because both are in the Bible. Not everything in the Bible is true, not everything is of God, and when we feed upon it we must learn how to distinguish. The first requirement is that we must meditate, think it through.

I hope you have established this practice. Don't take these words lightly. God is saying

that you will not be able to avoid the uncleanness which can come to you through Scripture unless you adopt the practice of meditation. That is what will make the Word come alive to you. Failure to do this accounts for much of the dullness which seems to prevail for so many people in the reading of Scripture. They tend to read it through, swallow it once, and forget about it. But the richness of Scripture never really begins to appear until you chew it over again, and again.

I love to do this while I am driving around in the car. There are times when I can turn on my automatic pilot and start thinking about passages of Scripture. When you are waiting for a red light, or tied up in traffic, or on a long stretch of open road you can do this. When you are washing the dishes, or vacuuming the floor you can bring out a Scripture, and work it over and think it through. You can meditate deeply upon it and thus discover its truths, its hidden secrets. God has designed that truth is to be hidden in the Scriptures.

You remember that Paul in writing to Timothy uses several complex symbols. He says that as a good soldier you are to endure hardship. No soldier gets himself entangled in civilian affairs. An athlete will never be crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to reap the first share of the harvest. And then he says, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything,” {2 Tim 2:7 RSV}. In other words, you won't grasp that kind of truth suddenly; you must think it through. So meditation is the first process.

2. But it is not only the chewing of the cud, but also the dividing of the hoof that is important. What does that mean? That is a picture of the principle of separation, of discrimination, discernment, of the need to distinguish between that which is from above and that which is from below, to take note of the fact that the Bible reports the lies of Satan and the confused thinking of men, as well as the revelation of the mind of God.

I remember the story of two lawyers during a trial. One thought he would make a great impression on the jury by quoting from the Bi-

ble. So he said, concerning his opponent's client, "We have it on the highest authority that it has been said, 'All that a man has will he give for his skin.'" But the other lawyer knew the Bible better. He said, "I am very much impressed by the fact that my distinguished colleague here regards as the highest authority the one who said, 'All that a man has will he give for his skin.' You will find that this saying comes from the book of Job {cf, Job 2:4}, and the one who utters it is the Devil. And that is who he regards as the highest authority!"

You can't quote the Bible indiscriminately. Many cults have arisen because of the failure to understand that a division needs to be made.

The book of Ecclesiastes, for instance, has given rise to many false ideas which have been widely disseminated and said to come from the Bible – which they do. But the book begins with Solomon's warning that it is a collection of the wisdom of man, gathered from under the sun. Thus it is not to be trusted but is to be tested against the revelation of God.

So, in this area we are to feed, but we are to apply to the food we take in, even from such a wonderful source as the Word of God, this double practice of meditation and of recognizing the principle of separation.

The **next sphere** from which the Israelites were to take food was the seas, Verse 9:

**"These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. But anything in the seas or the rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is an abomination to you. They shall remain an abomination to you; of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall have in abomination. Everything in the waters that has not fins and scales is an abomination to you." {Lev 11:9-12 RSV}**

The sea is used throughout Scripture as a symbol of the whole body of humanity, of the world, of society. Isaiah says that the human race is "like the waves of the sea which cannot rest," filled with

many sweeping currents of thought. This encompasses the whole realm of the business world and the marketplace, of the media of television and radio and magazines and music. Most of what is available in universities and colleges is part and parcel of this knowledge of the world and its ways. From this area we are to test food, ideas and concepts, by the double process symbolized by fins and scales – not one or the other, but both.

What does this mean?

Well, fins are that which gives a fish the capacity to move, to progress, to penetrate through the waters, to employ the element through which it moves for its own progress. And scales are that which protect it against harm, which resist the effect of the element in which this food is found, which preserve it from harm from the element. So it is necessary to have both the capacity to penetrate a subject, and protection from its effects in the world, from the way the world lives.

How accurately God teaches us truth this way! As the Israelites fulfilled this on the physical level there were certain fish they couldn't eat – catfish, for instance, because catfish have fins but don't have scales. They couldn't eat shellfish – crabs and lobsters and clams and oysters. There is nothing basically wrong with these as food, but they didn't teach the lesson God wanted his people to learn, and so they were forbidden to them, though they are open to us.

The Christian is to handle the knowledge of the world in this way. He is to keep moving on all the time. He is to keep asking, "Where does this lead? Where does this idea take me?" He is to penetrate to the heart of it. He is not to be content with mere superficial knowledge of a subject but is to move right into the heart of it and to carry its implications beyond the bounds of this life, to see how they affect life in the realm of the mind and heart and spirit. But he is to resist being captured or held by any human concept. He is not to be possessed by these kinds of ideas. He is to be in the world but not of it, as the Scriptures declare {John 15:19}. He is to live as our Lord lived – right in the midst of life, right up to the hip in fellowship with those who were involved with all kinds of wrong ideas, so that he himself gained the title of winebibber and drunkard and glutton, and yet, not reflecting these ideas, not living by these practices or principles, but moving right through them, heading on to his destination.

The **third sphere** from which food could come was the heavens, Verse 13:

**“And these you shall have in abomination among the birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the kite, the falcon according to its kind, every raven according to its kind, the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk according to its kind, the owl, the cormorant, the ibis, the water hen, the pelican, the carrion vulture, the stork, the heron according to its kind, the hoopoe [whatever that is], and the bat.”** {Lev 11:13-19 RSV}

These were all forbidden, and if you look through the list you can see why, essentially these were all either carnivorous birds, those who feed upon flesh; or carrion eaters, the vultures and buzzards; or those that are omnivorous, that eat anything and everything, the scavengers. This is instructive for us. And linked with them are other animals in the heavens – the winged insects:

**“All winged insects that go upon all fours [that both fly and crawl] are an abomination to you. Yet among the winged insects that go upon all fours you may eat those which have legs above their feet, with which to leap on the earth. Of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind. But all other winged insects which have four feet are an abomination to you.”** {Lev 11:20-23 RSV}

When I was in the Orient I was offered some very delicious roasted grasshoppers, covered with chocolate. I managed to turn them down; but they are regarded as a great delicacy in many parts of the world. The locusts were food for John the Baptist, you remember. He ate locusts and wild honey {Matt 3:4, Mark 1:6}, for these were permitted. But almost all other insects were forbidden to the Jews. Now why? What is it about these animals which is wrong, especially as carried over to the realm of ideas and knowledge, as symbols of the food that we can take in and live by, can accept as principles by which to operate?

Well, here we have food from the heavens, and, in Scripture, the heavens are always the realm of the spirit. The peculiar function of the spirit in man is that it enables him to relate to God and to beings beyond man. That is, this is the realm of religion. Man worships because he has a spirit which gives him the capacity to worship. Food from this sphere involves the whole realm of comparative religion, the world of metaphysics, and that of the occult and witchcraft and extrasensory perception. How do we handle this? How do we test foods in this sphere?

- First we are to reject all that are obviously carnivorous, i.e. related to the flesh, carnal in nature, arising out of the principle in man of self-indulgence, out of the flesh in its self-gratifying, self-sufficient propensities.
- Then we are to reject those that are eclectic, omnivorous, which embody ideas gathered from all sources with the attempt to blend everything together. There are philosophies like this abroad today which have been concocted by selecting a little from here and a little from there and trying to put “the best” from all religions together. But that is forbidden, because it is unclean, harmful, destroying.
- Finally, those insects which can crawl and fly but are not able to leap upon the earth were to be rejected. What does this typify? Leaping is a momentary linking together of heaven and earth. The Israelites were instructed to reject anything which had contact with the earth and could fly in the heavens but was not able to leap and thus to tie the two – heaven and earth – together. Ideas which accurately, successfully tie man’s earthly life to his relationship with God may be accepted. But we are still to be careful in this area. There is much food here, but we must examine it carefully, for there is much more which is to be rejected in this area. In fact, the limits in this realm as to what is really acceptable as food are very narrowly defined.

**Finally**, there was that sphere in which food was in full contact with the earth, Verse 29:

**“And these are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm upon the**

**earth: the weasel, the mouse, the great lizard according to its kind, the gecko, the land crocodile, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. These are unclean to you among all that swarm; whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening.” {Lev 11:29-31 RSV}**

And in Verse 41:

**“Every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth is an abomination; it shall not be eaten. Whatever goes on its belly, and whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet, all the swarming things that swarm upon the earth, you shall not eat; for they are an abomination. You shall not make yourselves abominable with any swarming thing that swarms; and you shall not defile yourselves with them, lest you become unclean.” {Lev 11:41-43 RSV}**

Here is the whole category of that which crawls or creeps along the ground, which goes on its belly. That immediately suggests the story of the Fall in the Garden. The curse which came upon the serpent was that he would crawl on his belly for the rest of his life. This is a mark, then, of the satanic curse. In the realm of human ideas and knowledge upon which we are to feed there is no prohibition of exploration or examination. We can look into these areas and see what they are. But when we recognize knowledge that reflects a satanic view – it is a sign of the curse, and we are to go no further. We are to reject it. It is wholly of the earth and relates only to this life, to its standards, its values, its emphasis on pride and human glory, its glorification of war and hate and death. We are not to take these ideas in and accept them as principles by which to operate. Thus when we recognize them as clearly satanic we are not to delve into or even to touch these ideas. This is why Christians are forbidden to explore into the occult, which is clearly satanic from the outset, because even the exploration will defile us and render us victims of demonic forces which are dangerous to humanity.

Why does God say this? He gives us the reason in Verses 44-45:

**“For I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls upon the**

**earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” {Lev 11:44-45 RSV}**

In our introductory study in this series, we saw that this word *holy* essentially means “whole.” To be holy is to be a complete person, to fulfill your humanity. Basically, a whole person is one who performs the function for which he was originally designed. What is that, in the case of man? It is to belong to God, to be his image. It is to be the vehicle for the expression of his life. Why do we call Palestine the “holy land”? Because it belongs to God. It is his. Why do we call this book the “Holy Bible”? *Bible* merely means book. Why do we call it the holy book? Because it is God’s book, it belongs to him, it originated with him. It is his possession and he uses it for his glory. And we are to be holy, for God is holy. He is devoted to that purpose for which he himself exists: he is a Creator, and he is a Lover. God is love. And so he operates in a whole way as a whole Being, a whole Person. This is what he wants for mankind. He wants us to be whole and to fulfill our humanity.

That is why God in his love sets some limits on our lives and says, “Don’t get involved with these things. Don’t take them in. Don’t fool around with them! You will be trapped if you do. You will be defiled, your humanity will be rendered unclean and will be destroyed, and you won’t be able to fulfill all the purposes for which you have been sent into the world.” So he limits us out of love.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, writing to these Christians in a Greek city with its worship of sex and love of sensuous pleasure, Paul says to them, “The body is not for fornication...” That is contrary to much of the philosophy of our day. The body is not designed for sexual expression as its primary purpose. It doesn’t exist for that reason. “The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord,” {1 Cor 6:13 KJV}. It is for him, so that through your body and your mind, your ears and eyes and heart and hands and voice, there might come, right where you are, the manifestation of God.

That is what God is after. That is what makes you a whole human being. It is not the religious activities you go through, nor how much time you spend in Bible study that God is really interested in. He is after the expression of his character in the

midst of where you work, and in your home, and among your family and your neighbors and your friends. He desires that the character which comes through to others from you is that of love and joy and peace, and of tenderheartedness and willingness to forgive and forbearance and understanding, and of the absence of grudge-holding and bitterness and hatred and enmity. That is the character of a whole person. So God says to us, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" {1 Pet 1:16}, and avoid these things that I have warned you against, for they will but defile you. They come from the enemy."

**Prayer:**

How helpful, Father, are these practical injunctions to our lives, especially as we face a world which is replete with many contradictory ideas, many concepts and

practices around us which are widely accepted, even by other Christian people, and are looked upon as being innocent and wholesome and beneficial, and yet your Word says that they are not. Lord, help us to take these guidelines seriously and to begin to examine the knowledge we are taking in from magazines and books and television and every other source, and to subject it to the tests you have outlined here. Help us to be obedient to you and to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, available to you to express your life through us. Lord, we long to be whole people though we live in the midst of a broken and fragmented world. We ask you to teach us how to be such, through your word and by your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

## Dealing with the Leprosy of Life

by Ray C. Stedman

Last Sunday we interrupted our series in Leviticus to meditate on the Christmas theme. But now we return to it to look into the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of this great book. In the present section we are seeing that God has provided standards and guidelines by which we may avoid the pitfalls, the traps, and the snares of life with all the consequent heartbreak and hurt and remorse that these can bring.

I was with my family and relatives up in the snow over the holidays. My nephew and I were sitting by the fire one day. I asked him, "You're fourteen now, aren't you? How does it feel?" He said, "Well, you know, I wish I could go back and live it all over again, and do it right this time!" I sympathized with him. Anyone who feels that way at fourteen is going to feel it a lot more at forty-one or fifty-one. But this is why God has given us this very practical section. It is in order that we might understand how to handle life. I have talked with several people in the past few weeks who were involved in deeply hurtful experiences. In studying through this passage I have been struck by the fact that each of them could have avoided these disasters had they known and understood the principles in these chapters. So let's look at them together.

You remember that in Chapter 11, which introduced this section, we saw God's concern for what his people ate. We saw that there was both clean and unclean food, harmless food and harmful food. Though this had an application in the physical realm regarding which animals the Israelites could eat, and though some of it was for health purposes, nevertheless the primary reason for these distinctions is to teach us how to choose food for the soul – the concepts and ideas which we accept and by which we live, by which we take on our characteristics of personality and temperament.

Now we come to a passage which deals with afflictions and diseases and, in the spiritual realm,

with what these do to us in our relationships with others, and between ourselves and God. Here we will find that many modern sanitary procedures are anticipated by the rules and laws laid down by Moses for the people of God. If these had been followed through the course of the centuries, many outbreaks of plague and epidemic would have been avoided – and still could be. For instance, included here is the necessity for periodic inspection of sick people to see how they are progressing and to enable the early detection of serious diseases. Also prescribed here is enforced rest for someone who is sick, and quarantine for infectious and contagious diseases. All of this was given by God to his people thousands of years before modern medicine ever began these practices. That is how advanced and up-to-date the Bible is.

But we would surely miss the import of these provisions if we take them to apply only to the matter of physical health. The primary reason for them is that they are symbolic of the afflictions and diseases of the soul, of the irritating and hurtful things that we feel and say and do to one another. We need to know whether these things are merely the harmless manifestations of a passing moment or whether they are something more serious, something deeply embedded which will cause trouble all our lives. This passage is given in order that we might understand this.

It is all introduced with a short chapter on **childbirth**:

**The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, If a woman conceives, and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purify-**

**ing; she shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed. But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for sixty-six days.” {Lev 12:1-5 RSV}**

That is a strangely appropriate text for this day after Christmas, for we are celebrating a childbirth – the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. And, in fact, that Baby came into the world to deal with the very problem which made this chapter necessary. God is not against childbirth, nor against babies. Nor is human birth essentially an inherently unclean event. That is not what this chapter teaches. There is nothing wrong with birth, nor with sex and all that accompanies it. The Bible makes that clear. But these requirements were given to the people of God in order that we might remember a most basic and fundamental fact: that since the fall of Adam every human being born into this world is born into a fallen race.

There is no way by which man in his natural condition is ever going to be able to solve, in any permanent way at all, the basic, fundamental problems of human relationships. No way. We are born into a condition that is tainted and twisted. Someone has thrown a monkey wrench into the human machinery, right at the very beginning, and it simply doesn't operate as God intended. God impresses this upon his people by this restriction, this reminder that something connected with birth is unclean. The fact that a mother was unclean for a week after the birth of a male child (two weeks for a female child), and that she had to go through another thirty-three days of purifying after that, provided an opportunity for her and her whole family to be reminded forcefully that the baby was born with a tainted nature.

It is very important that this be brought before us because it makes a difference in the way a child is trained. If you think, as many are taught today, that babies are born absolutely innocent, you will raise your child in quite a different way than if you believe the truth about them. They need guidance and training and help in handling this twisted nature. The world, of course, forgets about this principle. They want to pretend that babies are innocent, and that if you just leave them alone and give them opportunity to express themselves, they

will grow into whole, fulfilled persons. That destructive philosophy has caused chaos in our educational system and in society beyond. So God teaches his people right from the beginning that there is a problem here which must be handled and cannot be ignored.

It is very instructive that it is the people of God upon whom God impresses this principle. You would think that they, of all people, ought to be the ones to recognize and remember it. And yet, in my experience, it is God's people especially who need to be reminded of this today. We tend somehow almost to assume that our children will be exempt from this principle, will be born without sin, because we are Christians. We are amazed when they start to behave just like the neighbors' children. We get so wrapped up in these little ones and think they are so cute and so intelligent and precocious, so like us, that we forget that they have a tainted nature, a twist somewhere in their personalities which means that all of their will power is centered on themselves and that they need to have help in handling that problem. It is not that they need to be despised or treated as though they were pariahs. We are all afflicted by the same problem. But it is simply the point of wisdom to recognize that children have that kind of a nature and that they require discipline and love and instruction to handle it. If we ignore that, then that nature will inevitably lead them astray and into disaster somewhere down the line. So God makes this very plain right at the outset by declaring that there was a week of uncleanness.

The circumcision of the male baby was another reminder that something needs to be removed from the life inherited from Adam. Then the thirty-three days of purification followed. Again, this was doubled in the case of a female child. It is not easy to know exactly why. Surely the purification period was partly a humanitarian consideration. The mother was relieved from certain obligations to work around the house in recognition of the need for mothers to have a few days off, at least, after they had a baby. But the longer period after the birth of a girl is probably a reminder of the fact that evil did enter the race through the weakness of a woman who yielded to the temptation of the enemy. Now, the race fell in Adam, the man, not in Eve. But the temptation came through the woman and it was through that source that sin entered the race.



Finally, all this is cleared up and settled by means of a sacrifice. Again God is teaching that a death must come in. Life is at stake, and blood and death must intervene. And so, beginning with Verse 6, we read:

**“And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the door of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering.” {Lev 12:6 RSV}**

And in Verse 8,

**“And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” {Lev 12:8 RSV}**

The sacrifice cleanses.

It is so beautiful to see in the New Testament how Mary and Joseph followed this procedure to the very letter. When Mary gave birth to Jesus, sinless though he was, untainted with that original touch of Adamic sin which all of us inherit, nevertheless God, putting him in the place of guilty humanity, saw to it that they carried through these laws of Moses. So Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. Interestingly enough, doctors tell us that the eighth day is the first day that the baby's blood contains enough blood-clotting elements to make such an operation safe. In fact, the available clotting factors skyrocket on the eighth day to a level higher than normal, then rapidly level off to normal. So we find that the eighth day is the safest of all. And on the eighth day the Lord Jesus was circumcised. Then after thirty-three days Mary and Joseph went up to the temple to offer the sacrifices for purification. You remember that they were so poor they couldn't afford a lamb. So they brought the two turtledoves as an offering of purification.

Chapter 13 is lengthy and we will not try to cover it all today. It deals with the problem of **diseases and afflictions** which come upon the body. It is linked with Chapter 12, suggesting that this taint, this Adamic twist, this tendency which the Bible calls “the flesh,” this perverse individualism

within us which causes us to insist upon the right to run our own lives and do as we please, this ego around which we want everything to revolve and which you can observe in a baby. This is not removed by regeneration; when you are born again by faith in Christ, the flesh is still there. And a Christian still can and does sin. Many people seem to forget that fact and expect instant perfection from Christians, either in themselves or in others. But that is not possible. So we need help in dealing with this problem. The flesh needs to be recognized for what it is, and controlled. And that isn't easy.

Temperaments can be different. One can be quiet and placid, another fiery and explosive. There is nothing wrong with those differences. God made people to be different. He didn't make us all to be cool and dispassionate. Some of us are made to be more volatile and to react more quickly to stimuli. And that is not wrong. But there are displays of temperament which are wrong. There is an anger which is bad and wrong and sinful, just as there is an anger which is good and righteous. There is a pride that is right and beautiful, but there is a pride which is terribly damaging and injurious and wrong. There is a love of self which is perfectly right. It is a reflection of the fact that we are made in the image of God. In Jesus' summary of the Law the second commandment is, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” {Matt 22:39}. So there must be a proper kind of self-love. But there is a love of self which is awful and destructive, terribly selfish and self-centered, and ruinous to everyone around. How do you tell the difference?

Well, that is what this chapter is for. It begins this way:

**The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests, and the priest shall examine the diseased spot on the skin of his body; and if the hair in the diseased spot has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of the body, it is a leprous disease; when the priest has examined him he shall pronounce him unclean. But if the spot is white in the skin of his body, and appears no deeper than the skin, and the hair in it**

**has not turned white, the priest shall shut up the diseased person for seven days; and the priest shall examine him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes the disease is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall shut him up seven days more; and the priest shall examine him again on the seventh day, and if the diseased spot is dim and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only an eruption; and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean. But if the eruption spreads in the skin, after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again before the priest; and the priest shall make an examination, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is leprosy.” {Lev 13:1-8 RSV}**

The overriding purpose of this chapter is to enable the detection of leprosy. When the Bible uses this term, it is not merely referring to the disease that we call *leprosy* today, Hansen’s disease, which is a horrible and loathsome malady causing disfigurement and loss of facial features and other parts of the body. That is included in the term, but the Hebrew word translated *leprosy* here also includes other contagious and infectious skin diseases. They all were recognized to be dangerous and damaging, a serious threat not only to the individual but to the whole people, the whole camp of Israel, and so they were to be detected. The process of detection was prolonged and careful inspection. The priest was to look at the symptoms, then shut the diseased person up for seven days, examine him again, and shut him up for another seven days. At the end of that time he could determine whether it was leprosy or something less serious.

All of this has its counterpart in our own spiritual lives. This passage is talking to us about the afflictions and diseases of the spirit, the hurtful attitudes we have, the burning resentments, the feelings of anger and upset we go through, and the grudges we carry around in our hearts toward one another. These are to be detected because they can be very dangerous, and the process is to expose them to a priest. Remember, now, that in the New Testament pattern all believers are priests together. So here we have a picture of what at Peninsula Bible Church we like to call “body life,” the ministry of believers one to another, helping each other to see what is inside.

You see, we are all blind to ourselves. In my own eyes I am a very genial, gracious, inoffensive person. I get along with everybody and have the warmest feelings toward everyone. I don’t know why it is, but they don’t always seem to see me the same way. My own family tells me that there are times when I am not that way at all. I find myself very blind to my own failings. And we all have these blind spots. We rarely detect these things ourselves. That is why we need each other. And so the Israelite was instructed, when he had a manifestation of disease, to bring it to a priest and let the priest look at it.

The procedure the priest used was not that of impulsive judgment. He didn’t just snap his fingers and say, “Oh, I know what you have: You’ve got measles – or mosquito bites – or leprosy.” He watched the development of the case for seven days (that is the number of perfection) until he understood the nature of it, and only then did he make his pronouncement. (All this is so instructive in the way we are to handle one another and to help one another in spiritual matters.) But what the priest was especially concerned about was to detect leprosy.

There were four characteristics of leprosy, and each was very important and instructive. The priests looked for these manifestations. If the afflicted person had them it was leprosy; if he did not have any one of these then it was a relatively harmless illness. If we read on a little farther we will have them all before us:

**“When a man is afflicted with leprosy, he shall be brought to the priest; and the priest shall make an examination, and if there is a white swelling in the skin, which has turned the hair white, and there is quick raw flesh in the swelling, it is a chronic leprosy in the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean; he shall not shut him up, for he is unclean.” {Lev 13:9-11 RSV}**

The priest’s procedure was first to examine any spot that was in the skin, any kind of outbreak or eruption, in order to see what it was. It could be just a harmless pimple, but it might be something more serious. Anyone with an outbreak brought it to the priest, just as we are to bring to one another these spiritual and soulish or emotional eruptions that we have within.

- What the priest looked for in a suspected leprous disease was, first, whether the hair in the spot had turned white. White hair, as you well know, is always a sign of imminent and approaching death – relatively speaking.

I went to a barber last week. As he was cutting my hair I noticed, falling down on the floor around me, this white hair! I couldn't figure out where it was coming from. I couldn't believe that a young man like me could have hair that white. But I finally had to acknowledge the truth.

White hair is always a sign that the aging process is at work. "When the snow appears on the mountains, winter is at hand." And thus it was with leprosy. If the hair turned white it was a sign that death was at work. There are certain emotional reactions and attitudes we have which can be merely the matter of a moment – or they can be a sign that death is at work, that something harmful is going on. That was the first symptom he looked for.

- The second was that if the spot was deeper than the skin it was leprous. If it was more than superficial, if it was a more profound matter than a merely temporary pimple, then it was serious. Carried over into the spiritual realm this refers, of course, to that which is more than just the manifestation of a passing mood, a minor irritation of spirit. It is something which is more permanent, more characteristic of the individual, a prolonged attitude of irritability, of temper, impatience, bitterness, or resentment. These kinds of spots in the spiritual life are serious illnesses – they are leprous.
- A third mark of leprosy was the presence of raw flesh. If, as the priest examined the symptom, it was beginning to heal then he wasn't particularly disturbed. But if raw flesh was present which didn't heal, then, of course, it was regarded as leprous. Raw flesh is flesh that is obvious, flesh that is patent, blatant, open.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians we have a description of what raw flesh looks like. It is plainly and easily recognized. In Galatians 5:19 Paul says, "Now the works of the flesh are plain." Here they are: If immorality is pre-

sent it is obviously of the flesh – it is leprous – or impurity, or licentiousness (all of these have to do with sexual sin), idolatry (the worship of something other than God), sorcery (or witchcraft), enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit (breaking up into little factions and warring cliques), envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. These, Paul says, are raw flesh – flesh in its obvious form – it is leprous, and, therefore, very dangerous.

- The fourth mark of leprosy was that it spread. That is, in the spiritual realm, it affects others within the body of believers. A bitter spirit can be as contagious as smallpox. A rebellious attitude can spread like an epidemic and turn everybody against each other and against the Lord's authority. If this occurs, then the one who began it is obviously afflicted with a leprous disease and is unclean in God's sight. The disease is dangerous and harmful to the individual and to the body of Christ in which he lives.

In the light of all this, the provision given in Verses 12-17 is seemingly strange. We read:

**"And if the leprosy breaks out in the skin, so that the leprosy covers all the skin of the diseased person from head to foot, so far as the priest can see, then the priest shall make an examination, and if the leprosy has covered all his body, he shall pronounce him clean of the disease; it has all turned white, and he is clean. But when raw flesh appears on him, he shall be unclean. And the priest shall examine the raw flesh, and pronounce him unclean; raw flesh is unclean, for it is leprosy. [There is no kidding about it, no way to cover it over. If it is any of those things listed in Galatians 5 it is obviously the flesh, and it is leprous.] But if the raw flesh turns again and is changed to white, then he shall come to the priest, and the priest shall examine him, and if the disease has turned white, then the priest shall pronounce the diseased person clean; he is clean." {Lev 13:12-17 RSV}**

In Luke 17 there is the account of ten lepers who came to Jesus and asked for help. He told them to go and show themselves to the priests, ac-

ording to the Law of Moses. As they went their leprosy turned white and they knew that they were cleansed. This is a beautiful picture for us of how to handle leprosy. When what had been leprous turned white, then, even though the whole body was covered from head to foot, the priest pronounced the person clean. The turning of the leprosy to white meant that the evil of it was arrested, that its action was stopped, and that the person was cleansed.

Transferring this to the spiritual realm, this means that the evil in question has been brought under the judgment of the Word of God and that we have been cleansed. This, of course, means that the evil has been faced and has been named for what it is, as God sees it, and that we have repented of it. All the defenses that we have tried to build around it to protect it have been taken down, and we have realized that it is wrong, and have admitted it. Then God can cleanse us from it and it goes out of our life. The scars may remain; perhaps we will see them for the rest of our life, and others may see them too, but there is no need to fear any longer; the action of the evil has been arrested. What a beautiful picture this is of First John 1:9: If we confess our sins, admit them, God is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. What a gracious provision this is!

But in order for God's grace to be effective we must stop being defensive about our sins, stop excusing them. You know how easy it is to excuse them. We say,

- "Oh, I can't help it.
- "Our whole family has been like this for generations.
- "It's just because we're Irish.
- "There's no way I can stop it – that's just the way I am.
- "Don't expect me to change."

All these excuses are fences that we are building around our leprous disease to protect it and to keep it and persist in it. It is that desire to hang onto these hurtful, injurious attitudes which marks the fallen, Adamic nature within us.

Isn't it strange that we cling so tenaciously to these things which hurt us so badly, and hurt the ones we love? We hate to give them up. The pride of our hearts is such that we resist every attempt to

help us, and we are critical and cold and spiteful and hateful in response to those who try to point them out to us. What a revelation this is of the fact that this kind of leprosy is working in our lives.

We won't take time to read the rest of the chapter. You can study it at your leisure. In it we find that the same kind of examination must be made of several different categories of afflictions and diseases, and the same basic treatment administered. There were boils that could be either transitory or leprous, and burns that were either harmful or harmless. There were itches that needed to be examined to determine what was causing them. And there were scabs, called "tetter" in Verse 39. This is a general term for diseases like psoriasis and eczema and others that form scabs over areas of skin. All of these needed to be examined and diagnosed.

If we venture to interpret them we can see, by the nature of these categories, what their counterparts are in the spiritual realm:

- Boils are always painful infections which finally come to a head. They represent the crises of our attitudes and of our disposition within. We have all had the experience of having someone say something to us and finding that we resent it and that the resentment begins to fester within us. It keeps growing and growing, and though we try to put it away it keeps coming back and finally comes to a head, blows up in a crisis. That is a boil. It can be relatively harmless. It can be merely the result of momentary pressure on us and easily relieved by an explanation. Or it can be something very serious like deep-seated bitterness or a grudge carried against someone else. Remember that the letter to the Hebrews warns us that we are not to let any "root of bitterness springing up" {Heb 12:15 KJV} to trouble us, lest many be defiled thereby.
- Burns are injuries caused by circumstances outside of ourselves. We don't plan on them and yet we experience them. We can be burned emotionally. Many of us have used that very expression when we've gotten into some difficulty. We say, "I've learned my lesson! I got burned too badly on that one." These emotional problems need to be examined as to whether they are leprous or not, harmful or merely passing.

- Itches are continuing irritations which never go away, seemingly are always there bothering us.
- Scabs are crusty infections, partially hidden or covered. Their nature is often difficult to determine, and some of the covering must be removed before we can be helped.

All of this is zeroing in on one great question: Are your leprous spots being judged?

- Are they being dealt with openly in the light of the Word of God?
- Are they being brought to the One who can heal leprosy with a touch?
- Or are they being protected, covered over, hidden to avoid examination?
- Your moods, your disposition, your temperamental outbursts, your displays of anger or depression – what about them?

This is the question that God is asking. Leprosy is a terrible affliction. It will wreck and ruin your own relationship with God and with one another, so God is very concerned about this.

There is a bit of reassurance in Verses 40-42, at least for some of us who are thinning on top:

**“If a man’s hair has fallen from his head, he is bald but he is clean. And if a man’s hair has fallen from his forehead and temples, he has baldness of the forehead but he is clean. [That helps, doesn’t it?] But if there is on the bald head or the bald forehead a reddish-white diseased spot, it is leprosy breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead.” {Lev 13:40-42 RSV}**

Even baldness doesn’t save you. Even an open life, obvious to everyone, can still have leprous spots in it and therefore need to be examined. And leprosy must be dealt with.

Otherwise it results in a terrible judgment which is described for us now in Verses 45-47. This is the treatment which an uncured leper must undergo, and with this we will close:

**“The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean; he shall dwell alone**

**in a habitation outside the camp.” {Lev 13:45-47 RSV}**

You know how common this was in the New Testament – lepers outside the towns, living alone in caves, or with other lepers, going about with their upper lip covered, dressed in rags, and calling out “Unclean” – just exactly as the Law of Moses commanded. What is the purpose of this? Once again God is teaching us according to symbol. What was carried out on the physical level, according to the Law of Moses, is a picture of what God allows to come to pass in the life of an individual who refuses to deal with his leprous condition. These issues cannot be avoided. This is what will happen, as taught by these symbols.

1. First of all, there are torn clothes. As we have seen many times through the Scriptures, clothes are a picture of behavior, of the outward actions of an individual. Torn clothes mean behavior which has no sense, no unity. It is impulsive and unpredictable behavior. This becomes the inevitable result for someone who allows leprous spots in his life to go unjudged and unhealed. The first manifestation is a poorly integrated personality.
2. The second is loose hair. In Scripture, hair is always given as a mark of beauty. A woman’s hair, especially, is regarded as her crown of glory. Loose hair, then, is beauty disarranged, beauty lost. The potential is still there, but the inherent beauty of the personality is lost, is no longer beautiful but has become repulsive.
3. Then they are to cry, “Unclean, unclean.” This is a vivid picture of what happens in the case of unjudged soul-leprosy. There is a self-annunciation of uncleanness. You don’t have to tell people; the individual himself is constantly telegraphing to others what he is like. This is what today we’d call *bad vibes*. He is always giving out certain indications which are telling people, “I’m a disturbed person. I have an inner unrest of spirit.” Something about the impatient tone of his voice, the sharpness and harshness with which he speaks or deals with others is communicating the information: “Unclean, unclean.” Other people pick up the vibes and avoid him with obvious revulsion.

4. And so, the final result, if you are in such a condition, is that you dwell alone, a social outcast, wanting to get close to people, but unable to do so, longing for human companionship and love, reaching out but finding yourself turned off, rejected. That is the result – inevitably, relentlessly – of the failure to judge leprosy.

We are coming now to the end of the year and this is the time when traditionally we take a look at our lives. We can take a long look at what is going on in our own lives and at how we can help one another. What a good time this is, in the light of this chapter, to face our leprosy attitudes and feelings, our selfish motivations and our broken relationships with others, and to bring them to the One who can heal us. With just the touch of his word he can arrest the action of our evil and turn our leprosy white and set us free.

**Prayer:**

Our Father, how often through the course of this year we have injured one another by our leprosy conditions. And yet how stubbornly we have clung to them and refused to call them what you call them, have defended and protected and excused them. We are all guilty of this, Lord. Not one of us is free of this condition. But we don't want to be guilty of spreading it. And we don't want to have to endure the results of it in our lives. Lord, we know that you want your people to be clean and to walk in victory. So, by the faithfulness of your Spirit, please judge the leprosy of our lives and, touching it, heal it, as we bow before you, Lord Jesus. In your name we pray, Amen.

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## Sick Garments and Diseased Houses

by Ray C. Stedman

We start a new year together this Sunday, a year which stretches before us with all its possibilities yet unfulfilled, and with all the demands it will make upon us. A new year always means that new decisions must be made. Life seems to be made up of decisions. Have you noticed that they are getting more difficult as we go along?

It used to be that when I got dressed for a meeting all I had to do was to reach in my closet, pull out a white shirt, and put it on. Now I have to debate with myself between the blue one and the gold one and the yellow one and the striped one, and then choose the right tie to go with it and decide which socks to wear. It takes a lot longer to get dressed these days. Life is getting more complicated all the time!

In making decisions it helps to have guidelines. Fashion experts try to give guidelines, which helps a little – but not much, because they keep changing. But as we go through life, God, as a heavenly Father, is concerned about our needs, and he gives us reliable guidelines. How grateful we can be in this new year that we have such a provision for the future which lies ahead, unknown and unexplored. That is what this book of Leviticus is about. We have been studying a section in it in which God sets forth guidelines for his people to help them avoid the traps and the snares to which they would otherwise succumb, both physically and spiritually, in their journey.

You remember that God regulated the choice of food for the people of Israel so that they would avoid injurious food from unclean animals and would eat only that which would be healthful for them. And you recall how, in the infinite wisdom of God, this has its counterpart in the spiritual life. We can be greatly helped and guided by transferring the admonitions given here into the spiritual realm. Last week we looked in Chapters 12 and 13

at the guidelines God gave his people regarding leprous diseases, sores and infections of the skin, describing how they were to distinguish between the harmful and the relatively harmless. Once again this was of physical benefit to them, but also it was even more helpful as a picture of the diseases of the soul and the spirit, the burning attitudes of resentment, bitterness, envy, and jealousy, these leprous sores which can come into our life and which need to be cleared out. We saw how practical were the instructions God gave us as to how to recognize these and deal with them.

Now we come to a passage which is a continuation of the whole subject of leprosy. Beginning with Verse 47 of Chapter 13 we learn of leprosy in garments:

**“When there is a leprous disease in a garment, whether a woolen or a linen garment, in warp or woof of linen or wool, or in a skin or in anything made of skin, if the disease shows greenish or reddish in the garment, whether in warp or woof or in skin or in anything made of skin, it is a leprous disease and shall be shown to the priest.” {Lev 13:47-49 RSV}**

Obviously, here again *leprosy* means far more than merely the human disease we know today as Hansen’s disease. As we saw last time, it is a general term which includes many infectious and contagious diseases. Here it is extended to include certain molds and mildews and fungal growths which could attach themselves to garments. These could be either harmful or harmless. They could be contagious and spread to infect the whole camp. Thus they had to be recognized early and dealt with. Or they could be merely harmless spots or stains which could be removed without destroying the garment involved.

As we apply this to the level of life on which we live today – the spiritual, the social, the emotional level of our life – we need to determine what it is that garments represent. In our last study together we saw that the leprosy which infected an individual was a picture of the attitude of our heart, the disposition of our character, the temperament with which we approach life. But here the leprosy infects something which is somewhat outside of us, but yet is connected to us. Garments are always used in Scripture as a picture of character, especially as expressed in behavior. Earlier in this book we looked at the garments of the high priest, which were a revelation of the way our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, is equipped to deal with our problems. His garments reveal his character. Garments are used this way all through Scripture and are associated closely with the individual who wears them.

It is interesting that we still identify ourselves with our garments. Have you noticed that when someone pays you a compliment about your dress or your suit you are pleased by it? You take it as a reference to you as a person and you apply the compliment to yourself. That is because we are closely identified with our garments. Also, we change our garments frequently. We use different garments for the various roles we play in life. You don't play football in a tuxedo. You don't go skiing in a party dress. You use garments suitable for what you are doing.

All of us are involved in certain roles in life. Most of us are citizens of this country, and that fact makes certain demands upon us. We act differently as a public citizen than we do in private at home. At home we have various roles. Some of us are fathers, some are mothers, some are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. We relate to each other in different ways in these various roles. In our jobs some of us are carpenters, some are teachers, some are lawyers, some are housewives. All these occupations make various demands on us. Oftentimes we associate particular garments with these roles.

Garments, therefore, as used in Scripture, are a beautiful symbol of our relationships with others – our friendships, our associations, our contacts with the ones with whom we have to do – and of the roles which we play in life, and the character and attitudes we bring to those associations, particularly as regards our behavior. Now, what this

Scripture is teaching us is the possibility that this area of our life can be infected with leprosy disease. Certain practices and attitudes, certain aspects of our relationships with one another can have spots in them which are dangerous. Certain practices or habits we may fall into with another person can be destructive.

A relationship may be beautiful except for one area, one attitude that we hold – perhaps some dangerous, lurking, hidden resentment that we bear toward an individual and which comes out in our relationship. God wants us to deal with these leprosy diseases that appear in our relationships. He sets forth for us in this passage how to do it.

They require the same sort of treatment as did leprosy in our individual lives. For instance, we read in Verse 50:

**“And the priest shall examine the disease, and shut up that which has the disease for seven days; then he shall examine the disease on the seventh day.” {Lev 13:50-51a RSV}**

Notice that the same patient investigation is required as in the case of a spot in the individual himself. There is to be no hasty, impulsive judgment. How many times we offend this way! We see a person in a relationship with someone else and we are prone to be so critical and to leap to unwarranted conclusions. We don't take time to examine the relationship awhile, to think it through, to investigate before we come to a judgment. On the other hand, how frequently we err in the opposite direction in our own relationships, because of our emotional involvement. We enjoy a relationship that we have with somebody so much that we are defensive if anybody questions anything about it. We don't want to examine it and are immediately offended if anybody else does, and we won't listen to them at all. But the Word of God calls for an investigation when something is brought to our attention which is possibly hurtful or dangerous in a relationship. It is to be shut up for seven days (the number of perfection). That is, it is to be examined until you understand it thoroughly and know what you're doing. That is the first step.

Second, if the disease spreads, the garment must be destroyed, Verse 52:



**“If the disease has spread in the garment, in warp or woof, or in the skin, whatever be the use of the skin, the disease is a malignant leprosy; it is unclean. And he shall burn the garment, whether diseased in warp or woof, woolen or linen, or anything of skin, for it is a malignant leprosy; it shall be burned in the fire.” {Lev 13:51b-52 RSV}**

If a relationship has something harmful about it which is beginning to spread to and infect others, or if it is taking over such great areas of our life and is getting us so involved that we neglect our responsibilities in our other relationships, then drastic action must be taken. We all know how this can come about. We can get inordinately tied up with someone so that they begin to occupy all our time, and other people with legitimate demands upon us are slighted. If this is the situation, the relationship is dangerous and needs to be ended. A garment infected in this way must be destroyed, must be burned. This passage teaches us that it is better that this be done than that our life become totally unbalanced.

But notice Verses 53-55:

**“And if the priest examines, and the disease has not spread in the garment in warp or woof or in anything of skin [it is present, but hasn’t spread so as to affect others], then the priest shall command that they wash the thing in which is the disease, and he shall shut it up seven days more; and the priest shall examine the diseased thing after it has been washed. And if the diseased spot has not changed color, though the disease has not spread, it is unclean; you shall burn it in the fire, whether the leprous spot is on the back or on the front.” {Lev 13:53-55 RSV}**

In other words, there were spots which, if they didn’t spread, were not necessarily leprous and they could be remedied by being washed. Washing, in Scripture, is always a symbol of the action of the Word of God. Jesus said to his disciples, “Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you,” {John 15:3 KJV}. When a relationship has something questionable about it, and yet it hasn’t begun to affect others nor taken over inordinate time, but is still suspicious, then bring it to the

Bible and wash it with the Word of God, obeying what God teaches you about it. Perhaps the Scripture warns us about some undue affection, some promiscuous activity which needs to be corrected – the relationship as a whole is not wrong but just the spot needs to be dealt with.

I have seen this happen so often with young people who, in forming a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, fall into practices that are harmful. The relationship itself isn’t wrong, it just needs to be brought under the action of the word of God and washed and cleansed; then it can continue. If the washing helps, then just the spot needs to be removed, Verse 56:

**“But if the priest examines, and the disease is dim after it is washed, he shall tear the spot out of the garment or the skin or the warp or woof; then if it appears again in the garment, in the warp or woof, or in anything of skin, it is spreading; you shall burn with fire that in which is the disease. But the garment, warp or woof, or anything of skin from which the disease departs when you have washed it, shall be washed a second time, and be clean.” {Lev 13:56-58 RSV}**

What a practical help this is in handling our relationships! Perhaps a parent has a spot in his relationship with a son or daughter. Maybe it is a weak area in which he tends to be provocative and hurtful, or judgmental or critical or carping or harsh. That relationship needs to be washed, to be subjected to the Word of God. Or perhaps you have a spot in your relationship with a friend – some habit you’ve indulged, or some attitude that is wrong. Your friendship needs to be washed, and the spot must be torn out and removed so that the garment, the relationship, may be preserved.

How wise these words are, and how helpful! How much grief would be spared us if we would obey the tender care of God for his people, so that these ugly, defiling spots could be removed from our relationships with one another.

In Chapter 14 we move into a further development of this whole matter of handling leprosy. Here we have **the cleansing of the leper**, Verses 1-3:

**The LORD said to Moses, “This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest; and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall make an examination. Then, if the leprous disease is healed in the leper.”** [... and the LORD goes on to tell us what shall be done to cleanse that leper.] {Lev 14:1-3 RSV}

Notice that the leper does not go through all the ritual which follows in order to be healed; he does it in order to be cleansed. He is already healed. Healing is something only God can do. It is a sovereign act of God which takes place in the inner life. Cleansing is the understanding of God’s basis of healing by the person who is healed so that the behavior can be adjusted outwardly, afterward. That is the picture which is drawn here.

You see, you and I can’t heal our leprous hearts. If there is some wrongful attitude within us, if we burn with envy or jealousy or resentment toward one another, if we are impatient and upset and angry at heart – we seldom see these things in ourselves until God puts us into circumstances where they are brought out – and then the only thing we can do is take them to him because we are helpless victims caught up in these dangerous attitudes. When you finally see yourself like that, then you can say, “Lord, heal me!” And God does! With a touch of his grace he changes our attitude. We stop being defensive about it and we admit it. And then, as we have seen before, the leprosy is arrested, its action is stopped, and we are healed.

But then we need cleansing. We need to understand the basis on which that inward healing occurred so that our outward behavior can now be adjusted to a new pattern. That is what is brought out here in the cleansing of the leper. There was a prescribed ritual consisting of several steps which he had to go through before he could resume a normal life.

A. The first is given in Verses 4-5:

**“the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two living clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet stuff and hyssop; and the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water.”** {Lev 14:4-5 RSV}

What an unusual procedure! You can see clearly that God has thought through every single detail in order that we might learn from it certain great truths. Obviously, the basis for healing is always blood. God never heals, never blesses, never arrests the action of evil, apart from the shedding of blood.

- a) This blood, of course, is a picture of the blood of the Lord Jesus. The death of Christ, which ends the old nature, the old life, is what is constantly being pictured for us in these sacrifices. God is not in the business of putting Band-Aids on cancer. He strikes at the very root of the cancer. He never deals with mere symptoms. He eliminates the whole problem. That is why God is never content merely to clear up a few symptoms in your life. He wants you to see that these problems are arising out of an evil nature which has to be ended by death – either of the individual himself or of an innocent substitute on his behalf. There is no other way. So the shedding of the blood of this bird is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus and his death for us.
- b) The bird was put in an earthen vessel and killed over running water. An earthen vessel is a picture of the humanity of Jesus. In Second Corinthians 4 we, in our basic humanity, are said to be “earthen vessels,” {2 Cor 4:7}.
- c) And running water, in Scripture, is forever a picture of the Holy Spirit, in his refreshing, life-giving quality. Remember that Jesus said “rivers of living water” will flow from the hearts of those who are filled with the Spirit {John 7:38}.

So this is a picture of the Lord Jesus, in his humanity, having come where we are, and yet filled with the Spirit. And he was put to death in order that we might be cleansed. We have to understand that healing is by the shedding of blood. But that is only step one.

B. The second step is found in Verses 6-7:

**“He shall take the living bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet stuff and the**

**hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water; and he shall sprinkle it seven times upon him who is to be cleansed of leprosy; then he shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird go into the open field.” {Lev 14:6-7 RSV}**

Every detail of this is beautifully significant:

- a) The cedar tree was regarded in Israel as the acme of beauty and glory. It symbolized natural beauty.
- b) Hyssop, on the other hand, was a tiny plant which grew in nooks and crannies, somewhat like moss. It was regarded as a symbol of the lowliness, the rejection, the insecurity of humanity. So here we have a picture of the natural glory and beauty of man, and, at the other end of the scale, his resemblance to the lowliest, most insignificant shrub.
- c) Then, scarlet stuff was always a symbol of artificial glory. Kings wore scarlet. Thus, all this is a picture of everything to which man looks for security – status, prestige, natural talents, and even the pretense of being insignificant, upon which we sometimes count to gain sympathy from others. All this is set aside. It is dipped in the blood of the bird that was killed and thus is marked, is judged by that death.
- d) Then, along with that, the living bird was released into the heavens. This is a picture of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He died, as prefigured in the one bird, and he was released into the heavens in the other. So God is teaching by these means that the healing of our leprous relationships with others is on the basis of the death and the resurrection of Jesus, who takes away from us all dependence upon natural beauty or artificial glory, or upon anything else of the old nature, and sets us free to be new creatures in him.

Doesn't that typology work out beautifully? How remarkably these Old Testament symbols teach us these great truths!

- C. This step was followed by the personal cleansing of the applicant. This is described in Verses 8-9, which we won't take time to read. He had to wash himself, i.e., apply all this to himself, and then there was a testing period of seven days to be sure his cleansing was genuine.
- D. Then, on the eighth day, he was to bring offerings as outlined in Verses 10-13. We won't go into these because we have dealt with them in detail before. But the order in which the four offerings had to be brought is important.
  - a) The trespass offering was first. You see, leprosy in a garment always means that we have injured somebody, or that they have injured us. A trespass has occurred, a relationship has been hurt or broken, and that needs to be dealt with first. And so the trespass offering, the Lord Jesus offered on our behalf for our trespasses, is in view.
  - b) Then came the sin offering. That goes deeper, to our very nature, and we learn from it that, in the death of Christ, God has somehow dealt with the very source of the evil within us. We don't have to follow these urges to do evil anymore. We still feel them but we are not bound to them as we once were. We are freed from the dominion of sin.
  - c) Next was the burnt offering, which recognizes the devotion of a heart which has been cleansed and is now open and accepting toward God and is dedicated to him.
  - d) Finally came the meal offering, which represents the presentation of our humanity to him.All of this renders the leper now clean from his leprous disease, and even his relationships are cleansed, and so he is free to enter normal life once again.
- E. One other requirement is listed in Verses 14-18:

**“The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt [trespass] offering, and the priest shall put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on**

**the thumb of his right hand, and on the great toe of his right foot. [This is very precise and specific, isn't it?] Then the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand, and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the LORD. And some of the oil that remains in his hand the priest shall put on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the great toe of his right foot, upon the blood of the guilt offering; and the rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. Then the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD.” {Lev 14:14-18}**

What does all this mean? Well, it is most significant.

- a) Blood is always a picture of guilt removed, of evil ended. And the blood is applied to remove the offense of the ear, the hand, and the foot.
- You see, if you have fallen into leprosy, evil within, it is because you have listened to and have followed a false philosophy. So the ear must be cleansed.
  - Then you have manipulated and maneuvered – that is what the hand does – and thus you have created an offense of the hand. You have gone along with what you have heard and have begun to manipulate and maneuver others in the wrong direction.
  - And then your feet have gone in paths they should not have followed, and so your walk needs to be cleansed.

So the great teaching of this passage is that the blood of the guilt offering cleanses. When you have some spot in your life which is wrong, and you have recognized it, and its action has been stopped by the repentance of your heart, then the blood that God applies to you in the death of Jesus Christ on your behalf actually cleanses away this offense. All the instruments of

evil are cleansed. Your ear, your hand, your walk have all been cleansed. You are forgiven – that's the point!

- b) But that is only part of it. Then oil is to be put upon the blood. Oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. It is not enough just to put the blood on these instruments, these members of our life. They are to be yielded to the Spirit of God. The oil is put upon the ear and the thumb and the foot in order
- that the mind may now be devoted to hearing the things of the Spirit, and
  - that the hand may be offered to the Spirit of God to be maneuvered and manipulated as he desires and wills, and
  - that the walk may follow.

Then the leper is ready to return to society.

Do you see how instructive all of this is?

I was down at Arrowhead Springs this past week speaking to several hundred college students. A girl came up to me at the close of a meeting and said, “I want to ask you about a problem. I have a friend who is always irritating me. I feel resentful toward her. But I know that is wrong, and I keep reminding myself of the fact and dealing with it, confessing it to God. But it keeps coming back. How can I be freed from this?” I said to her, “The problem is that you are doing only part of what the Lord tells us to do. We are to judge the evil, we are to reckon our members as dead unto unrighteousness – but we are also to turn around and make them available to God for his work. We are to offer them to him for righteous purposes. You are judging the evil of your heart's attitude toward her, but then in place of that you are not turning and loving her in the power of God.” The negative is not enough. The positive is also required. We need not only the blood to arrest the action of the ear, the hand, and the foot, but we also need the oil, the Holy Spirit, who now takes over and begins to reach out in love. I said to her, “The next time you feel this resentment, try not only to judge it, but in its place to reach out to your friend in the strength of the Lord and begin to be kind and nice and loving to her, expecting God to do the work through you.”

The last section of this chapter deals with **leprosy in houses**: Verses 33-38:

**The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a leprous disease in a house in the land of your possession, then he who owns the house shall come and tell the priest, ‘There seems to be some sort of disease in my house.’ Then the priest shall command that they empty the house before the priest goes to examine the disease, lest all that is in the house be declared unclean; and afterward the priest shall go in to see the house. And he shall examine the disease; and if the disease is in the walls of the house with greenish or reddish spots, and if it appears to be deeper than the surface, then the priest shall go out of the house to the door of the house, and shut up the house seven days.” {Lev 14:33-38 RSV}**

The procedure is the same, you see, for leprosy in a house. Obviously again we are dealing with mildews and molds and fungi, the kinds of things which can appear on the walls of a house. I have been in the tropics and have seen plaster walls just covered with green mold and mildew! In this passage these are regarded as possibly contagious, and they have to be investigated, patiently and carefully.

What is it that corresponds to the house in our experience? You remember that in the New Testament the church is called “the house of God” {1 Tim 3:15, 1 Pet 4:17 KJV}. Now, it is not the church building; that is not where God lives. It is God’s people who are the house of God. So what is in view here is an association, a group, an assembly, a gathering of Christians together. And it, too, can have a leprous infection in it. When this proves to be the case it needs to be dealt with. It must be treated, even drastically at times.

Notice Verses 39-42:

**“And the priest shall come again on the seventh day, and look; and if the disease has spread in the walls of the house, then the priest shall command that they take out the stones in which is the disease and throw them into an unclean place outside the city; and he shall cause the inside of the house to be scraped round about, and the plaster that they scrape off they shall pour into an**

**unclean place outside the city; then they shall take other stones and put them in the place of those stones, and he shall take other plaster and plaster the house.” {Lev 14:39-42 RSV}**

The priest is to get rid of the stones that are affected.

If you want a graphic illustration in the New Testament of the carrying out of that process with regard to a church, simply read Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. There he is writing to the group of Christians in Corinth, and there were certain infectious diseases running rampant through that house. There was a man in their midst, one of the stones of the house, who was living incestuously with his father’s wife, his stepmother {1 Cor 5:1-5}. The situation was so bad that even the pagans around them were offended. Paul said to them, “Remove him; take him out of the place and set him aside!” Paul wrote this in love, but in utter honesty. Then he went on to reprove them for certain other wrongs which had allowed this situation to arise. That is, he scraped the plaster and removed that too. In his second letter to the Corinthians you will find that this treatment had its desired effect. The house was preserved. In fact God, in grace, restored the lost stone and it was put back into the house. The man repented of his deeds and his place in the house was preserved.

Discipline within the church is what is in view here. It must be exercised in order to arrest such contagious diseases.

But if the house remains infected the day will come when it must be destroyed. Verses 43-45

**“If the disease breaks out again in the house, after he has taken out the stones and scraped the house and plastered it, then the priest shall go and look; if the disease has spread in the house, it is a malignant leprosy in the house; it is unclean. And he shall break down the house, its stones and timber and all the plaster of the house; and he shall carry them forth out of the city to an unclean place.” {Lev 14:43-45 RSV}**

In the opening chapters of the book of Revelation there are seven letters from the Lord Jesus to seven churches in Asia. In each one the Lord, as the great high priest, is examining his house. And in each one he sees certain things that are wrong

and need to be corrected. He gives careful directions as to what they are and he allows the churches time to take care of the problems. But in each case he says that if they fail to do so he will visit judgment upon them and the house shall be broken down and the church will cease its testimony. This is what God does with a group of Christians who allow open evil to go on unjudged in their midst. The house ultimately is broken down and thus their testimony is ended. God does it if men will not.

We won't read any more of it now, but the chapter goes on to make provision for the cleansing of a house in which leprosy has been arrested. Again it involves the birds, one killed over running water in an earthen vessel and one let loose into the heavens. The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the basis upon which an assembly can be cleansed.

Finally, **the chapter concludes:**

**“This is the law for any leprous disease: for an itch, for leprosy in a garment or in a house, and for a swelling or an eruption or a spot, to show when it is unclean and when it is clean. This is the law for leprosy.”**  
{Lev 14:54-57}

How wonderful it is to see God's concern for his people, to see his tender compassion, and his desire that every spot which is dangerous or harmful be immediately examined. And if we will apply these instructions today on the level at which we live, as the people of Israel were instructed to apply them then, how marvelously God's people will be preserved from that which wrecks and ruins and ravages and destroys! How healthy we will be, how whole we will be as persons! This is why these texts are given to us – to enable us in the most practical way to be able to distinguish that which is harmful from that which is harmless.

Now the new year lies ahead of us. And we are called, as the people of God, to begin to examine our lives carefully, and to look first to our hearts. Are there leprous attitudes there? Are there bitter spirits and resentful attitudes and injurious, lustful longings that need to be dealt with? Then we are to look at our relationships with others. Are there things which are wrong there that need to be brought to God and healed and then cleansed so that our behavior can be adjusted? And then in the house of God, the groups of Christians that we meet with, is there anything wrong there? If so, it is to be brought before God so that health can be restored to his people. For the whole theme of this book, remember, is “Be ye holy, for I am holy,” {cf, Lev 20:26 KJV}. Be whole persons, for God is a whole Person.

**Prayer:**

Our heavenly Father, as we look forward to the coming months, we long to be whole people. We do not want to be stumbling and falling, nor infected with loathsome running sores which disfigure us and make us unclean and revolting to others so that we must live in solitary loneliness. We want to be whole people, fulfilled and complete and healed. We want our relationships to be proper, our homes to be healthy, and our hearts to be right before you. Lord, we ask you now to deal with us, so that we might understand these principles and apply them correctly. So with David we pray, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer,” {Psa 19:14 KJV}. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## The Trouble with Nature

by Ray C. Stedman

We are dealing in the book of Leviticus with the great symbolic pictures of what God has provided for us in Jesus Christ and of how to live life and to face trials and problems and dangers and difficulties, and solve them – all taught to us in these wonderful shadows and types of the Old Testament. Today we come to the fifteenth chapter, and perhaps some of you have been afraid of what we run into here.

The other day I greeted one of the leading men in our church and said, “Hello, how are you?” He said, “I’m fine, but a little fearful.” I said, “Fearful of what?” And he said, “I am a little afraid of what you are going to do when you come to the fifteenth chapter of Leviticus.”

In this chapter we have reference to certain bodily functions, especially discharges from the body, which many feel are so personal and intimate that it is not proper to read this in public nor to refer to it openly. But my answer to that is: “If this chapter should not be read then it should never have been written.”

We are assured in the book of Proverbs that “every word of God is pure” {Prov 30:5 KJV}, is clean, and there is nothing immoral or wrong about any portion of Scripture. If the Holy Spirit can be charged with poor taste, then what in the world is the measure of good taste? Our problem is that our attitudes need to be corrected. The Word of God ought to judge and correct us, and not we it. It is

our outlook of prudishness and oversensitivity that is wrong. The Bible looks at the human body with a wonderful frankness. It is never vulgar, never obscene, never descends to toilet-talk, but neither is it squeamish or priggish. It simply treats these subjects as they ought to be treated.

These bodily functions are absolutely essential to our lives, and there is nothing wrong with them. Like many of you, I was raised under the Victorian ethic which assumed that the human body ended at the waist and that nothing below that was ever to be mentioned. Now, of course, we have swung so far in the opposite direction that it might appear that there is nothing above the waist! But I genuinely feel that the swing to an extreme of permissiveness in sexual matters, which we see so much abroad today, is a direct result of the extreme which already prevailed of Victorian prudery toward the body and especially toward sex. God made sex and he likes it. He designed it and so there is nothing wrong with it nor is there anything wrong in discussing it. But oftentimes the way we have been raised makes us overly sensitive in this area. So it is necessary that we correct this attitude and see ourselves as needing to be changed. When this chapter speaks as it does of menstruation, of seminal emissions, of the normal discharges of elimination, there is no need for us to blush, to squirm, or to feel embarrassed. If we do, it is a sign that we need to adjust to reality.

With that as an introduction, let's examine this chapter where certain normal and even unavoidable discharges from the body are dealt with:

- First those concerning men, in Verses 1-18,
- Then those concerning women, in Verses 19-30, and,
- Finally, a short summarization.

This chapter, dealing as it does with such open frankness about these matters, always reminds me of an incident which took place when I was being discharged from the United States Navy at the end of World War II. In common with thousands of others who were leaving the services at that time I had to undergo a physical examination. Any of you who have been subjected to this know that it is always done en masse. Two or three hundred young men like myself were stripped absolutely naked and we were all standing in line in a room where we had to endure a very intimate and thorough examination. At one point which was particularly embarrassing, the young man standing next to me in all his natal glory – I don't know who he was – looked over at me and said, "You know, I just can't get over how many things the United States Navy is interested in!" I feel very much like that about this chapter.

You can't read the book of Leviticus without seeing how intimately God is concerned with his people. He is deeply concerned about every minor and trivial detail of their lives. He regulates their food, their clothing, their activities, their treatment of diseases. He gives counsel and advice on every matter of life. If you are one of those people who suspect that God is so great and distant and remote from us that he cannot be concerned with you, {then} you have only to read a passage like this to see how intimately, deeply, and compassionately he is concerned. No wonder the Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "Even the very hairs of your head are numbered. You are of much more value to God than many sparrows," {cf, Matt 10:30-31, Luke 12:7}. Everything about us is of great concern to our heavenly Father. So it was with his ancient people and so it is with us today.

As we look at these various discharges and see what they meant in terms of the physical lives of God's people then, we need also to see what they

mean to us on the level of our spiritual development now.

The first problem concerns **discharges associated with certain diseases:**

**The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Say to the people of Israel, When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. And this is the law of his uncleanness for a discharge, whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is stopped from discharge, it is uncleanness in him." {Lev 15:1-3 RSV}**

As you pass through life you unavoidably pick up certain infections which create bodily discharges like diarrhea and runny noses. God is concerned for his people about these. So for these kinds of discharges a very strict quarantine was imposed upon them, Verses 4-12:

**"Every bed on which he who has the discharge lies shall be unclean; and everything on which he sits shall be unclean. And any one who touches his bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until evening. And whoever sits on anything on which he who has the discharge has sat shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the evening. And whoever touches the body of him who has the discharge shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the evening. And if he who has the discharge spits on one who is clean, then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the evening. And any saddle on which he who has the discharge rides shall be unclean. And whoever touches anything that was under him shall be unclean until the evening; and he who carries such a thing shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the evening. Any one whom he that has the discharge touches without having rinsed his hands in water shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the evening. And the earthen vessel which he who has the discharge touches shall be broken; and every vessel of wood shall be rinsed in water." {Lev 15:4-12 RSV}**



The amazing thing about that passage is that it describes the exact procedure used today in modern hospital to prevent the spread of infectious and contagious diseases – yet anticipated in this ancient book written some 1700 or 1800 years before Christ, long centuries and centuries before modern science discovered anything about bacteria and viruses and the need for sanitary precautions. All these practices were imposed upon God's people by their heavenly Father in order to prevent among them the diseases which were rampant in the ancient world. Remember that God promised them when they came out of Egypt, "If you will walk in my ways, I will put none of these diseases upon you that were in Egypt," {cf, Exod 15:26}. This is the way he fulfilled that promise. He quarantined them. He taught them how to deal with infections and contagions. And there is no question but that these restrictions and regulations saved the nation Israel from many dangerous plagues which were decimating the pagan populations around them. Perhaps this is one of the major reasons that Israel has been preserved as a nation through all these centuries.

Once a person was cleansed, once these discharges stopped running, then the individual was to offer an offering, as we have seen in many earlier instances, Verses 13-15:

**"And when he who has a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes; and he shall bathe his body in running water, and shall be clean. And on the eighth day he shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and come before the LORD to the door of the tent of meeting, and give them to the priest; and the priest shall offer them, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD for his discharge." {Lev 15:13-15 RSV}**

It is evident that the unavoidable diseases, afflictions, and discharges mentioned here are of a much less serious nature than the leprosy with which we have been dealing in previous chapters. You remember that when the leper was cleansed he had to go through a much more rigorous ceremony which included several offerings. But here the very simplest of the offerings is prescribed – two turtle-

doves or two young pigeons: one for a sin offering, one for a burnt offering – the cheapest, the most available of the offerings. Yet God never once sets aside the requirement for the blood of an innocent substitute to be shed in the place of one who is defiled for any reason whatsoever. By this means he underscores the great fact that human nature needs to be dealt with by blood, by life poured out. It is a deep and complicated problem. It cannot be solved by a mere rearrangement of surface symptoms. God is constantly underscoring that for us in these offerings.

There was a second type of discharge which was concerned with sexuality, Verses 16-18:

**"And if a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water, and be unclean until the evening. And every garment and every skin on which the semen comes shall be washed with water, and be unclean until the evening. If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water and be unclean until the evening." {Lev 15:16-18 RSV}**

Here we are dealing with married sex. It would be a great mistake to judge from this passage that the Bible suggests in any way that sex in marriage is immoral or wrong. This is simply God's reminder of the pollution of nature, of the fact that the nature of humanity is fallen and that man cannot solve his problems himself. He desperately needs a Savior. And he passes on to his children the same fallen, twisted nature and propensities which he himself is born with.

We who are parents know how this has proved true. When our children were born we looked at them in their innocence and felt deeply within ourselves, "I can teach this child how to avoid all the mistakes that I have made. I can pass on the wisdom which I have accumulated through the years. If I watch very carefully I can teach him how to live and how to avoid having to go through what I am going through." Yet it never works out that way because, though we can help them in certain ways and give them counsel and guidance, nevertheless they will have to make some of the same mistakes that we made. Their nature is just as twisted and they will be just as blind to counsel from their elders as we were at their age. They will pay no more attention to good moral precepts and

standards than we did. They will go right ahead and make the same blunders even though they are warned in advance. Even though they recognize that what they are going to do is wrong they will still do it. Life is continually confirming this great fundamental fact which the Scriptures set before us – that there is something wrong with nature.

So all that God is doing here when he says that the act of sex results in an uncleanness until evening is simply reminding us that man is a fallen creature and that he must deal with that problem realistically. He can't avoid it. There is no way that he can eliminate it himself. God must handle it, and God has handled it. There is only one way it can be handled – the redemptive intervention of God – and if it isn't handled that way there is no escape from the defilement and the destruction of humanity which will follow. So God reminds us that even in the act of sex which results in conception there is a fallen nature involved.

In Verses 19-30 there is a **very similar passage dealing with women**. We won't take time to read it because you can do that yourself. It deals with the normal, natural monthly menstrual flow of women and, in Verses 25 and following, with abnormalities which would be caused by diseases. Again, there is no implication here that there is anything morally wrong about this function. But the symbolic significance is the same and in each case the treatment is exactly the same – washing, being unclean until evening, and the offering of a sacrifice of blood which would cleanse and thus take away the defilement involved.

In reading a chapter like this we can recognize its intense value on the physical level to prevent the contagion of infectious diseases. But it has primary significance on the level of the spiritual. This is why these pictures in the Old Testament are given to us. We are reminded of that in Romans 15 where the Apostle says, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our instruction, that we might learn thereby," {cf, Rom 15:4 KJV}. As you lift this passage to the spiritual level you find very many practical and helpful suggestions.

We don't have to guess at what the spiritual applications are. Our Lord himself made them for us, as recorded in the seventh chapter of Mark. He said, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him," {Mark 7:14b-15a RSV}. Nothing

you eat or drink, can defile you, ceremonially and morally. Mark adds this parenthesis in Verse 19: "(Thus he declared all foods clean.)" There are no unclean foods. There may be dangerous food, even poisonous food, but it is not unclean in this moral sense. Then Jesus went on to say, "What comes out of a man is what defiles him," {Mark 7:20}. The truly dangerous discharges are not from the physical life, you see, but from the moral life. "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man," {Mark 7:21-22 RSV}. Here our Lord lifts this from the physical level to the level of the Spirit, on which we are to live. He says that it is these things which defile the human spirit, the tabernacle in which the Spirit of God has taken up residence. You will notice that many of them are unavoidable. There are certain evils that he lists there which are obvious and blatant and which can be avoided even by those without Christ. Murder and adultery and some of the other more open sins can be avoided by many people. But he also lists many which cannot be avoided, which will be found in us from time to time, whether we like it or not, even as Christians. Even in the most devoted and the most spiritual-minded of believers these things are sometimes present. Devious words which leave a wrong impression, thoughtless actions, foolish, prideful ways, hurtful, sharp responses – these come without our thinking sometimes. They come without planning, unpremeditatedly. And they represent the fact that the evil, fallen nature – even though we are believers and have a new relationship with Christ – is still there and is so subtle, so close to us, so silken that it slips out sometimes without our being aware.

The other day I said something in a jocular fashion to a young man who was telling me a story. I didn't mean anything offensive by it; I was just joking. But I learned later that he was very grievously wounded. And I had to take action to restore our relationship which had been broken. I hadn't meant to offend. But you know how sometimes we can say something to an individual and the tone of our voice will convey something quite different from what the words mean.

Many marital arguments have gone on for hours over: "Well, yes, that is what you said, but what you meant by your tone was entirely differ-

ent.” We try to justify ourselves: “All I said was...” “Yes, but how did you say it?” Thus offenses can occur, defiling, injurious, hurtful relationships can ensue. And these discharges from life come all the time – especially when the passions are aroused, as in anger or sex. It is these discharges from within that defile. Jesus said so.

What are we to do about them? Are we merely to ignore them? Are we to go on our way and think nothing more of them? No. If we do, we are in trouble. They will add up against us. They will start stacking up in our subconscious. Guilt will begin to increase, and restlessness will come into our spirits. We will find a coolness, a coldness coming in and invariably we will begin to lose out on the warmth and the fire and the love of life because of defilement of the sanctuary, the tabernacle in which we dwell.

So God has provided a way, a remedy. Notice what it is in the passages we have read:

1. First, a person who is defiled shall bathe. As we have already seen, washing is always a picture of the action of the Word of God. The person’s defiling thought, his statement, his tone of voice, his attitude of heart, he shall take to the Word and see what the Word has to say about it. The washing of the Word is the beginning of cleansing.
2. And then he shall be “unclean until the evening.” What does this mean? We have seen this phrase all through Leviticus and need to know what it conforms to in our own spiritual experience.

There are two degrees of rejection described in the Old Testament. First, the people of Israel could become “unclean.” Or, second, they could be “cut off from their people,” called an abomination before the Lord. These are two degrees:

- *Uncleanness* is what we call being “out of fellowship.” It means to revert somehow for the moment from rest and dependence upon the Spirit of God to a momentary manifestation of the flesh, the old life, the old nature. There is a break in communion with the Spirit of God so that the flow of the life of Christ in the believer is temporarily arrested. Although Christ doesn’t forsake him for one moment, nevertheless,

there is, for the moment, no enjoyment of his life. That is to be unclean.

- To be *cut off from the people* corresponds to what in the New Testament is called “apostasy.” It means to come to the point where we are set aside, “delivered unto Satan,” Paul says {1 Tim 1:20, 1 Cor 5:5 KJV}, “for the destruction of the flesh.” This is much more serious. It can result ultimately, if it continues long enough, in a complete turning of the back on the faith. But mere uncleanness is much less serious than that, but it is to go on until evening.

This is instructive for us because among the Hebrews the day began at sunset. So the idea is that uncleanness continued until a new beginning, until the sun set and a new day arose. The counterpart of that in the spiritual life is the moment when we repudiate this fleshly manifestation and return to a position of trust in God and we walk again in the Spirit. Thus a new day begins. Whenever we rely upon the Spirit of God it is a new creation, a new beginning, a new day. The Spirit is the Lord of creation and so to be restored to fellowship with him is a new beginning.

Therefore, this is a beautiful picture of what is to happen in our spiritual life when we become aware of having said something harsh or thoughtless or critical or unkind. We are to repent, to change our mind, to stop defending it and making excuses for it. We are to repudiate that old nature and immediately turn to the Lord and say, “Lord, thank you for your forgiving grace, and for your love which now picks me up and restores me to where I was before. Let’s walk on together.” That is a new beginning. Unless you do that you remain unclean. And that is how defilement gradually comes into the spirit of man and defiles the sanctuary in which God dwells. That is when coldness sets in and warmth disappears and we become fretful and restless and unhappy. We have all had this experience, haven’t we? We know how it works. But here God is teaching us how to handle it.

3. The third element in the cleansing is the offering of blood. All through this book you find that God’s cleansing agents are always water

and blood. In his first letter John says that Jesus came to us by water and by blood {cf, 1 Jn 5:6}. He came to cleanse us in this two-fold way:

- The blood, of course, speaks of the death of Jesus on our behalf, which frees God to love us without any restraint whatsoever. The blood is what God really sees. The blood of the innocent Substitute pays our guilt for us in our place and thus God is vindicated in his justice. God has poured out upon Another all the horrible wrath which he has in his holy nature against sin, so that the world can see that God means it when he says he hates sin. But once that happened, he was then free to forgive – freely, completely, wholly, without any reservation whatsoever – and to let his love flow out to us. That is what the blood always speaks of. It isn't easy for God to forgive. He is a just God. He is not only loving but he is also just. And his love is restrained by his justice until something occurs which can free him. This is what the blood always does. And our recognition of the fact that Christ has borne that penalty for us is the application to our lives of the offering of the blood. This is the means by which God is able to accomplish our restoration.
- But the water, again, represents the Word, and the water is meant for us. It cleanses our conscience. You can say, "Yes, God has forgiven me." But what many people do is to go on and not forgive themselves. They don't allow their conscience to be cleansed. But when we read in the Word of God that he has washed away our sins {cf, Acts 22:16} and has forgiven us all unrighteousness {cf, 1 Jn 1:9} – if we believe that Word then our own conscience is clear, and we are cleansed by the Word. How often have you quoted First John 1:9? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And you have said to yourself, "If God said that then he must mean it. Therefore there is no reason for me to be beating myself on the back about this sin any longer. God has

cleansed me. I am not dirty nor defiled any longer. I am clean." And you are free to go on with your conscience clear once again. That is the effect of the water.

The water and the blood together cleanse the conscience and free us from guilt before the justice of God.

All of this, you will notice, is in order to keep us from defilement, Verse 31:

**"Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst." {Lev 15:31 RSV}**

How careful God is to insure that we walk in a way which will allow him to pour out to us the fullness of his glory, joy, and peace! And if we don't experience these it is oftentimes because we allow defilement – these unavoidable issues of our life – to come in and remain uncleansed. We didn't intend to do them. We didn't deliberately commit them. But there they are nevertheless. And they must be cleansed! We are to deal with them and handle them in this way which God has prescribed. When we do then we have a sense of untroubled peace and joy.

Perhaps this will help you.

I know that many people struggle at this point. Young Christians especially are often unaware of why they start out their new lives with a joyful experience but after awhile it all seems to pall. Many times it is because they have not learned how to deal with these unavoidable discharges of life, these aggravating things that they say and do which are hurtful and injurious to others. But when they do learn to apply God's remedy then the sanctuary is cleansed and the Spirit of God is free to release to them all the warmth of the light and life of a loving Savior.

How practical these matters are!

How much they can help us as we walk through life together!

#### **Prayer:**

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your deep and penetrating concern and

compassion for us. We are defiled from day to day as we walk through life. We do need the cleansing of your Word, the purifying of your blood. We thank you that it is available to us and we pray that we will be honest about these matters and will not merely let them go unattended. How they can sneak up on us and defile us, Lord, when we are not aware! But help us to

keep short accounts with you and to walk honestly before you and let your Holy Spirit cleanse away all the defilement of our lives so that we may be gracious and honest, open and loving, and careful of one another. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our great Substitute, who gave himself for us so that this might be true, Amen.

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## The Need for Presentation

by Ray C. Stedman

The sixteenth chapter of Leviticus is the conclusion of the first great section of this book. We have been looking at God's provisions to meet his people's needs. How like a Heavenly Father he watches over us, his people, with tender, compassionate care! How intimately he is concerned with every detail of life, even the most trivial, even matters of diet and clothing and how to treat apparently rather insignificant diseases. The fact that all this has counterparts in our spiritual life is a tremendous encouragement to us to walk in faith and to draw upon his resources.

If an earthly father sits down to figure out the budget to meet his family needs he usually puts aside so much for rent, for food, and for clothes, so much for education, for recreation, and for other essentials – *TV Guide*, etc. But God does it quite differently. When he determined the essentials and made provision for them, as you notice he stresses through this book, he set aside so much to provide for love, for joy, for peace, and for forgiveness, so much for companionship, for understanding, and for guidance. These are the essentials as God sees them.

You remember that in the Sermon on the Mount when our Lord Jesus is setting forth the secrets of life he goes through a list of things that men seek for, and he says to his own, "I don't want you to be anxious about what you shall eat or drink

or how you are going to be clothed. But," he says, "the essential thing is: seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness – these necessary things of the spirit," and then almost with a touch of disdain he adds, "and all these other things will be added unto you" {cf, Matt 6:31-33}.

How we have reversed that! We spend our time and energy thinking about how to get money to provide food and clothing and education and so on, and we have just a little time left over for the essentials. No wonder life often goes awry! No wonder so much of it is lived backward! But once again, we are called by God to put life back in balance and to give attention to these relationships with one another, to the love and the peace and the joy of our lives, and then these other things will find adequate place without any struggle. They will come not out of any automatic provision but out of the normal workings of life.

As we have gone through this book together God has taught us, first of all, the need for a substitute. Despite all the accumulation of human knowledge we cannot handle life adequately by ourselves. The offerings taught us that. We need a substitute beyond humanity, a divine substitute, one who took our place. And this we find in Jesus Christ. And then, because we don't understand the mysteries of our existence apart from someone who can explain them and apply them to us, we need a

great high priest. That too is met in Christ. Then we need a standard, something to measure life by, to tell us the difference between what will hurt us and what will help us, what will advance us and what will destroy us. We need God's gracious word to understand what confronts us in life and thus to be able to distinguish between right and wrong and good and evil. That is not easy to do, but God has provided a standard. Finally, we come now in this chapter to what the Jews to this day call Yom Kippur, the great Day of Atonement, the high point of the year in the life of Israel.

I have struggled for several weeks over what to title this message. I have changed my mind several times because it is hard to focus precisely on what this chapter is driving at. But finally as I worked this passage through I came to see that the great thing God is after here, the ultimate end of all his working in our lives, is to bring us to a presentation of ourselves before him, to meet our need to appear in a face to face encounter with the living God, to come before his presence in a satisfying communion which fills every aching void of our lives.

If I could read your hearts I am sure that deep within you I would find a hunger and a cry after that very thing. That is what accounts for the restlessness of humanity. It is the cry of the human spirit for the face of God. Nothing is more confirmatory of the fact that man is a creature flung from the hand and heart of God. We can never forget the fact that one day long ago we humans were made to walk in daily fellowship in the cool of the garden with a living God. We still long for that, and no human relationship can quite satisfy that yearning. We have all found that even the nearest and dearest to us can go only so far in meeting that desire. Then their efforts begin to fade and a void is left unfulfilled. That void, that cry for something more than your dearest companion can give you, is the cry of your spirit for the face of God. Remember how beautifully David puts this in the 27th Psalm. He says to God,

**Thou hast said, "Seek ye my face."  
My heart says to thee,  
"Thy face, LORD, do I seek."  
Hide not thy face from me. {Psa 27:8-9a RSV}**

The difficulty we all have with this is the ease with which all the sin and evil and the shameful habits of our life cloud and veil us from the face of

God, the ease by which the memory of what we have done and been comes back to haunt us and to disturb our sense of boldness and confidence in coming to God. In other words, we have a troubled conscience. But the ultimate end of God's work with us is to give us a clear conscience. That is what he is after – a clear conscience – before him and before men. This is what is so beautifully taught us in this passage.

We have seen how God has provided for cleansing from the uprising of leprosy within us. Remember that leprosy is a picture of sin in its blatant, open manifestations, of obvious forms of evil. And we have seen how he has also provided for cleansing from the discharges which come from within, the unavoidable expressions of a fallen nature that we experience from time to time. But now he is coming to the delicate matter of how to rid us of that sense of defilement which is on our consciences and which persists even though we know we have been forgiven.

I find so many Christians struggling at this point. They say, "I know that God has forgiven me. I know that the Word is true, that he has paid the debt for my sins. And yet I seem to feel so guilty all the time, so haunted, and I feel ashamed to come to God. I feel that I am unworthy." And they wrestle with these problems and are troubled by thoughts which come to them even while they are trying to pray. This is Satan's favorite ground of attack upon us. But this is what God is dealing with on the great Day of Atonement. This is the final matter to be settled which would otherwise exclude us from the presence of God.

Notice the beautiful provisions that God has made, as taught in these pictures and types of Chapter 16. Verses 1-2:

**The LORD spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died; and the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the holy place within the veil, before the mercy seat which is upon the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat." {Lev 16:1-2 RSV}**

No greater privilege was ever given to Aaron the high priest than to be able to come before the very presence of God in the holy of holies as the

shining presence of the Shekinah glory of God hung above the mercy seat. And yet God says, "Don't come at all times. Come only once a year." That limitation grew out of the fear aroused in the hearts of Aaron and the rest of the priests by the death of Aaron's two sons. You remember that in an earlier study we had the story of how they had brought "strange fire" before the Lord and thus were suddenly burned up by a flash of flame from the Shekinah glory of God. This had made Aaron and his other two sons afraid. Who wouldn't have been afraid?

I have often thought that these priests of old, when they realized that they were dealing with a God of righteousness and justice, had to be so careful that they did what he prescribed that they probably made up check lists like ones pilots use before they take off. I know I would have had up my sleeve a little card of certain items that I could check off to be sure that everything was right. And this feeling of fear imparted a sense of inhibition, of uncertainty, in coming before God's presence.

But even here, under the Law, with its shadows and its types, God gives a special provision by which the whole nation, in the person of the high priest, once a year at least, could come openly and boldly before the very presence of God himself, without any sense of fear. The priest could come once a year confidently into the holy of holies. This is a picture for us of what we are to do continuously in Christ, as you will see as we go further on in this story.

Notice what the priest had to do. There are seven steps in the process. The first is found in Verses 3-4:

**"But thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and shall have the linen breeches on his body, be girded with the linen girdle, and wear the linen turban, these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on." {Lev 16:3-4 RSV}**

Step number one was to bathe himself and put on the linen garments. You remember that earlier in the book we had a listing of the garments the high priest wore. They were these inner garments made of linen, and then on top of them there was a

great robe of beauty and glory with the bells around its hem, and over that the ephod, a sort of vest, and finally a breastplate. But all the outer garments were to be laid aside when the priest went in to the holy of holies.

Perhaps you have heard messages by preachers who have taught that when the high priest went into the holy of holies the people were able to tell whether he was still alive or not by listening for the tinkling of the bells on the hem of his robe. I have heard preachers describe with dramatic emphasis how the whole crowd waited with bated breath outside the tabernacle and listened to hear the bells, because they knew that the high priest would be struck dead if anything were wrong, if everything had not been confessed in the camp of Israel. Well, that is so much homiletical hogwash, because the high priest did not wear the robe with the bells into the holy of holies. He wore only the linen garments.

As we have already seen, those linen garments were a picture of the personal, private righteousness of the Lord Jesus, the inner righteousness which only God can see, not the public display of his sinlessness but that inner righteousness of his thoughts, his attitudes, his reactions. In all of the life of the Lord upon the earth there was not one moment when that inner righteousness was not perfect. Never once was there a yielding to the pressure upon him to give way to playing with filthy thoughts. He was normal, and he experienced every temptation such as we do, but never once did he give way. This is God's way of teaching us that as we come before his presence we are to come clothed with the inner righteousness of Jesus Christ, so that our inner life is as acceptable to God as our outer life. Both have been cleansed by the blood of his death on our behalf for our sins – the visible sins that we have committed, and the secret sins of the heart. The ground on which we stand is Jesus' righteousness, not ours. This is the first step.

After this the priest was to offer the sacrifices, Verses 5-6:

**"And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel [notice] two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.**



**“And Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house.” {Lev 16:5-6 RSV}**

Here is the provision made for the fact that Aaron was not, like Christ, without sin. He was merely a shadow, a picture of Christ, but was himself a sinful man like we are. And so he had to offer sacrifices for himself which, we are told in Hebrews 7, were not necessary for Christ. Jesus needed no sacrifice for himself.

And then comes the requirement regarding the two goats, Verse 7:

**“Then he shall take the two goats, and set them before the LORD at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots [almost like flipping a coin] upon the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other for Azazel.” {Lev 16:7-8 RSV}**

Azazel is a name which many have been troubled and concerned about. Many scholars have debated its meaning, but the consensus seems to be that this is one of the names for Satan. So one goat was to be chosen for the LORD and the other for Satan. We will see why in a moment, Verses 9-10:

**“And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.” {Lev 16:9-10 RSV}**

It is important to note in passing that the goat was not named Azazel. The goat was not Satan. There are cults which teach that the goat represents Satan and that therefore Satan is the ultimate sin-bearer. But that is not true. The goat was sent to Satan, and the sins that were placed on it, as we shall see, were placed there to be sent to Satan.

But first we are concerned with the goat for the LORD. This goat marks the stake, if I may use that term, that God has in the crucifixion of Jesus. When we consider the death of Jesus we almost always think of it as on our own behalf. That is, we were forgiven there. His life was poured out on our behalf and, quite properly, from that event we count our forgiveness and acceptance before God.

But what this is teaching us is that God also had a stake in the death of Jesus, that God was blessed and glorified and magnified in that death.

If you think about it you can see why. You see, forgiveness is not an easy thing for God to display. He can't do as many people seem to think he can – simply look at our evil and say, “Oh, well, that's all right. Forget about it. I love you anyway. Just go on.” If that were the way that we are forgiven then God would deny his character as a just God. But God is just and, in a sense, his justice struggles with his love. God's justice says, “Everyone who deliberately commits transgressions must be set aside from my presence. He cannot come before me.” This book teaches that again and again. God's justice excludes us from his presence and sends us away. If God were just, and only just, he would wipe out the human race without exception. Not one of us could stand.

But God's love doesn't want to do that. Yet how can his love be expressed unless his justice is satisfied? That is what the death of Christ does. When God's Son hung on the cross God did not spare him a thing! He poured out upon him every bit of his wrath against sin. Every bit of his justice was satisfied in the death of his Son upon the cross. Thus God is vindicated. The whole world can now look at that event and say, “Yes, God is just – even though he loves us.” The death of Jesus freed God to show his love to us. Apart from his death you and I would never have known that he is a God of mercy, of compassion, and of tender, forgiving grace. We would never have seen that he is willing to suffer for us on our behalf, that he had that kind of heart. Thus God himself is magnified, his character is glorified before us, by the death of Jesus. And this is what is portrayed by the goat that was for the LORD. It was on his behalf that this goat was to be sacrificed.

In Verses 11-14 we have the details of Aaron's sacrifice of the bull for himself:

**“Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small; and he shall bring it within the veil [right into the holy of holies, right before the presence of God] and put the incense on the**

**fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat which is upon the testimony, lest he die; and he shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times”** [the number of perfection, completion, absolute satisfaction]. {Lev 16:11-14 RSV}

By this God is saying, “The sacrifice of the life of the Lord Jesus on your behalf has rendered you as though you had about you the sweet smell of Jesus Christ himself.” When we come before his presence God smells that sweetness of Christ, and does not smell us. This is the first deodorant used in Scripture! This is the way by which the evil odor of our own failure is eliminated and the sweetness of Jesus Christ is substituted on our behalf. And this is what we are to remember when we come before God in prayer at any time. It is beautifully expressed in a quote that I ran across recently, by an unknown author:

Scripture recognizes, as the accuser [Satan] does also, that nothing so impedes your access to God as a guilty conscience. You can't draw near boldly unless your heart is sprinkled from an evil conscience. Therefore, if you want to overcome Satan at this point, don't just talk to him about the blood of Christ. Instead, accept the fact that the blood of Christ completely satisfies God about you. Remind yourself that God welcomes you into his presence not on the grounds of your Christian progress, the depth of your knowledge, nor even the degree of victory that you have found, but on the ground of the blood of the Lamb. The discovery of this glorious secret has enabled saints down through the ages to overcome the accuser. They did not remind him of the blood of Christ. They reminded themselves. They refused to wilt before his accusations and were, therefore, able to enjoy free access to the throne of grace, and full liberty in their service. They believed that God fully accepted them.

Verses 15-19, which we won't take time now to read, simply trace for us how this cleansing is extended to the structure of the tabernacle, to the altar itself, and to the very holy of holies – the inner sanctuary of the spirit. We are that tabernacle in

which God dwells. And our whole being, our whole body, soul, and spirit, our whole life, is cleansed in God's sight by this sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.

But now, what do you do with these evil thoughts that come to you? Here we come to the heart of this whole matter. What do you do when you kneel down to pray – or stand up or walk about or whatever you do – and even while you are praying some filthy thought comes across your mind? Or some hostile reaction suggests itself to you? Or even while you are trying to demonstrate love to somebody some welling up of anger or impatience comes in? What do you do with that? Your immediate temptation is to say, “Good night, what's the use? I'm trying to walk in the Spirit and even in the very process of it I feel defiled?” What do you do with these problems? Well, here is God's provision, Verses 20-22:

**“And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.”** {Lev 16:20-22 RSV}

He sends him back to Azazel. This is very significant. You notice that all the iniquities, all the transgressions, all the sins were placed upon the head of this goat.

Both of these goats are a picture of Jesus:

- In one he is represented as satisfying the heart of God on our behalf and rendering God free to love us without any restraint at all by his justice. God's justice has been satisfied. He no longer makes demands of that kind upon us. He is free to forgive us at any time and to love us.
- But the second goat represents Christ as bearing the whole weight and load of our guilt, all that which the Devil tries to use as a basis

upon which to ground his accusations against us. All this is to be sent back to him from whence it comes. When our Lord died he went into the wilderness of death like this goat, and returned to Satan all the accusations which he has against any believer at any time.

So what this passage is teaching us is that this is what we are to do with these accusations. In Ephesians 6, Paul calls them “the fiery darts of the wicked one” {cf, Eph 6:16}, i.e., all those little suggestions to us that we really aren’t accepted and loved by God, that he still has a reservation about us and that we still aren’t able openly and boldly to come before his presence, and all the haunting memories of our past shame, our feelings of unworthiness, our filthy thoughts, and the flashes of fear that come upon us. What are we to do with them? Well, we are simply to put them right on the head of Jesus and say, “Lord, take them back to Satan. They don’t belong to me. They are not my thoughts. They didn’t originate with me. They may feel like mine but they are not. They belong to him. That is where they came from and I am sending them back. And I recognize that in your sight they are no longer taken into account in any degree, and that I stand boldly in your presence.”

That is the purpose of the great Day of Atonement. It means that we are able to do as the Scriptures exhort us – to stand and present ourselves before the Lord of Glory and, as Paul says in Romans 12, “by the mercies of God, present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship,” {cf, Rom 12:1 RSV}.

Now, you want to worship God this morning. That is what you have come to church for. Well, how do you do it? Simply by believing that he has accepted you the way you are and has already dealt with everything that is wrong – everything – and is now ready to use you without any hesitation whatsoever. And you are to say “Lord, here I am. I am counting on it. Thank you for it. Let’s go. This is exciting! What are you going to do through me today? What are you going to do this next moment in the relationship I am entering into with this person? How are you going to handle it?” And your mind and heart can be at peace. (By the way, all this is also the clear teaching of Hebrews 10, which you can study for yourselves.)

In the rest of the chapter you will see how God confirms that he has accepted our presentation. First there is the sacrifice of the burnt offering, which is always the symbol of the total acceptance of a person by God. Then, beginning at Verse 29, he gives us the final conclusion:

**“And it shall be a statute to you for ever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves, and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you; for on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you, from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD. It is a sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute for ever.” {Lev 16:29-31 RSV}**

A sabbath is a day of rest. As we have already seen from the Old Testament and the New, the sabbath is a picture of the rest of your spirit when you are counting not on what you have done, but on the work of another on your behalf – even in this realm of all the accusations of a guilty conscience. You are to recognize that God has cleansed your conscience and you are to believe it! You are to accept that fact and return these vagrant thoughts to Satan from whence they come, send them back to him, and recognize that God is ready to use you. You can rest on that fact with a full sense of your worth in his sight, knowing that you belong to him and that he loves you fully and has taken care of everything that would exclude you from his presence. That is the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement, the fulfillment of the day of rest.

There is an old, favorite hymn which says this so beautifully. Let’s read its opening words together. I hope you will read them with new perception of their significance and let them be your prayer:

Jesus, I am resting, resting  
In the joy of what Thou art;  
I am finding out the greatness  
Of Thy loving heart.  
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,  
And Thy beauty fills my soul,  
For, by Thy transforming power,  
Thou hast made me whole.

## The Need for Presentation

That is what God is after – to make you whole, ready to work as a whole person, as an instrument of his life in you.

### **Prayer:**

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this promise, and for the beauty of this ceremony which in Israel of old could only occur once a year but which for us is to be momentary, daily, over and over again.

We are to come boldly into thy presence with joy, with hearts washed from an evil conscience, and we are to come before your presence with gladness and thanksgiving, not on our merit but on the merit of Another, that our human lives may be the sanctified instruments of a holy God at work in a lost world. How we give thanks for this and pray that it may be our experience, not only this moment but every day of our life! We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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## **Blood and Sex**

**by Ray C. Stedman**

Just before I left for a time of ministry in the Philippines we completed our study of the first half of the doctrinal teaching of Leviticus. Today we begin the second major division.

You remember that the first half is all about the provision of God for his people. God is teaching – through shadows and types, i.e., through visual aids – the same great truths that he seeks to impart to us through the New Testament. The Apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians that the Law was a “schoolmaster” to bring us to Christ. A schoolmaster is a teacher, a pedagogue, an instructor. So the Law – the Ten Commandments, plus the ceremonial law that we have been looking at in this book – was designed to bring us to an understanding of what Jesus Christ can be to us, now. That is the whole purpose of the first part of the book of Leviticus. All its beautiful imagery is given to picture the resources that we have in Jesus Christ – God’s provision of life and power for his people. Then, after this, the latter half of the book turns to the behavior which is expected on the basis of that provision.

Notice the order in which these occur: first the provision, then the standard of behavior. God never reverses that order. He never talks about behavior without first having spoken about provision. God is not a legalist, as so many believers are. Legalism, or what some call Galatianism – the great curse that Paul deals with in Galatians – is

rampant among Christians in the world today. I have just come from a trip around the world and I have seen it everywhere. Legalism, with its heavy demand for morality upon people who do not yet understand how to meet that demand with the proper response, is a deadly thing! Yet it is widespread wherever you go in the Christian world today – here in the United States and everywhere else.

Much of the reason for this worldwide spread of legalism is that Christians either do not understand the power available to them or they ignore it and try to respond to the demand for morality by reliance upon their own self-effort and will power. That is phony Christianity! It never works. It never will work. It has created much of the weakness of the church today. The church has gained the image in the eyes of many of being a place where morality is taught, where a high standard of life is preached, but where nobody practices it. This is why the idea has gained such wide popularity around the earth that Christians are basically hypocrites who talk of standards that they do not live.

But in the Scriptures, God never talks about our behavior until he has first talked about his provision of the power by which we can meet his demands. Only when he has taken great care to help us to understand the basis upon which to operate, the provision that he is ready to make in Je-

sus Christ – only then does he start talking about what the standards of behavior are to be, with the expectation that we will draw upon his resources in order to meet his demands. This is the order you have here in Leviticus – power first, and then demand.

There are two areas of life which were particularly carefully regulated for Israel, the ancient people of God their behavior toward blood and their behavior toward sex. These two were undoubtedly chosen because both are mysteries to fallen humanity. We don't understand either one. And because they are mysteries they are forever fascinating enigmas to human hearts. You will recognize immediately that blood and sex, death and life, are always the two great, underlying themes of literature, of drama, of art, of Song, and of dance – of all that is offered to the public as entertainment. You can't pick up a magazine or go to a movie without finding at least one or probably both of these themes flung at you in every conceivable way because they hold such continual enchantment and fascination for human beings everywhere.

In Chapter 17 the mystery of blood is set before us and in Chapter 18 the mystery of sex. In this new series of messages we will touch just upon the highlights of each chapter and will leave to your individual study the detailed investigation and application according to the principles we learned in the first series. But together here we want to discover the great thrust, the great lesson that God is trying to drive home in these chapters.

So let's examine the behavior required of the people of Israel with regard to **blood**. God is very interested in that, and he expends considerable effort to impart some great truth related to it.

The first requirement was that **all blood must be offered to the LORD**:

**And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron and his sons, and to all the people of Israel, This is the thing which the LORD has commanded. If any man of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the door of the tent of meeting, to offer it as a gift to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man; he has shed blood;**

**and that man shall be cut off from among his people." {Lev 17:1-4 RSV}**

In Verse 13 there is a further requirement:

**"Any man also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust." {Lev 17:13 RSV}**

If anyone killed a domestic animal it had to be brought and offered as a peace offering to God, and the blood was to be poured out and collected in a basin. The priest had to perform certain rituals with it and then the meat of the animal could be eaten by the man's family. And even if he was out hunting, the blood of any animal he killed had to be treated with respect and poured out and covered over with dirt, lest a ceremonial defilement result.

What is God trying to impart with this kind of requirement? What is the lesson that he had for these people which still applies to us? We don't have to follow the letter of these regulations anymore, but we do have to obey the great principles that are involved. You will notice that for an Israelite to violate this requirement was a very serious offense. He was to be cut off from among his people if he did not follow it carefully. So this must be a very important principle.

Earlier in this book we have studied through the various penalties that were assessed for failures among the people of God. You will recall that the mildest form of punishment was to be declared unclean until evening. We saw that this was the equivalent of our experience of reverting from walking in the Spirit to walking in the flesh. The minute you depend upon yourself – your personality, your background, your training, your heredity, your dedication, whatever – to accomplish something for God's sake, you are walking in the flesh, rather than depending upon the activity of the life of Jesus Christ in you as a Christian, which is walking in the Spirit. The whole Bible labors to teach us that walking in the flesh is always unacceptable to God. It doesn't make any difference how good the results of it may appear to man; it is unacceptable to God. According to Paul in Romans, "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God," {cf, Rom 8:7}. So if you do walk in the flesh it is uncleanness. And anyone who does so is unclean until he begins to depend again upon the

Spirit of God. This is reflected in these Old Testament practices.

But here is something even more severe. This violator is to be cut off from among the people. This is the equivalent of the form of ostracism which is commanded in the New Testament when someone evidences a deliberate intent to continue in evil even when he knows it is wrong. You remember that there are particular instructions as to how to deal with this situation. In Matthew 18, Jesus tells us that if your brother falls into a fault of some kind you are to go to him and tell him what is wrong between you and him alone. If he will listen to you then it is all over and you can forget it. "You have gained your brother," Jesus said {Matt 18:15b RSV}. "But if he won't hear you," if he willfully continues to offend, then you are to "take two or three with you and go to him again. If he won't hear them," and still remains unwilling to change his behavior in accordance with the Word of God, then "tell it to the church." And if he will not hear the church, then let him be to you as a Gentile or a publican, i.e., as though he were not a Christian at all {cf, Matt 18:16-17}. That is what it means to be cut off from among the people – to be set aside and to have one's whole relationship to God in doubt. Even the question of his salvation is in jeopardy. This is the seriousness of failure to treat blood properly and to recognize that it belongs to God.

The reason for this is given in Verses 5-7:

**"This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they slay in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD, to the priest at the door of the tent of meeting, and slay them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD; and the priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of the LORD at the door of the tent of meeting, and bum the fat for a pleasing odor to the LORD. So they shall no more slay their sacrifices for satyrs, after whom they play the harlot. This shall be a statute for ever to them throughout their generations." {Lev 17:5-7 RSV}**

The object of this whole requirement is to teach that all life belongs to God and that he alone is capable of handling it rightly. Only God understands life. That is the basis for all proper behavior. If you don't understand that fact you are not going to

behave properly. You can't. You must understand that your life belongs to God, and that all other life around you, even animal life, must be brought before God and related to him, with the understanding that life is a mystery which we cannot handle ourselves, in which man is incapable of properly directing his own affairs. This is the truth which God seeks to impart.

This is set against the pagan practice of offering animals to demons, called "satyrs" here. A satyr is a mythological figure, half-goat and half-man. It is really just an objectified form of demon worship. God is teaching his people that they are not to try to placate the spirits, as though man could manipulate the unseen spirit world and run life according to his own desires by some kind of abracadabra, hocus-pocus, or other form of magic. It is amazing what a grip this idea has upon people's minds! As you know, it is becoming more and more fashionable in our own day, with the rise again of interest in the occult, in astrology, and even in Satan-worship. All of this is motivated by people's desire in some way to manipulate and control the world of the spirits so that man thus handles life by himself. But that is what God wants us to get away from. We cannot handle life by ourselves. And this whole matter of bringing every bit of life and offering it to God was designed to teach people that fundamental fact.

When I was in the Philippines I had the great privilege of boarding one of the small planes operated by the Wycliffe Bible Translators and flying in to one of the remote tribes in the famous rice terrace area of northern Luzon. Perhaps you have seen pictures of the great rice terraces built in that region. They have been there for thousands of years and are sometimes called the "Eighth Wonder of the World." We dropped in to a little pocket-handkerchief airstrip carved from the side of a mountain and bumped along it until we finally stopped, then walked in to the village where Marjorie Cook, who grew up in this church, is working among these tribespeople with her helper. I stayed overnight in their guest house, and I was so entranced by my visit with these people.

But the thing that they were doing when I arrived was both saddening and fascinating. They were offering a pig to the spirits! I happened to arrive just as the sacrifice started, when they caught the pig and tied it up. Then, as I watched, the old women of the tribe gathered around and

said incantations over the pig, bowed before it and waved cloths over it, and mumbled and whispered to the spirits. Then they took a knife and slit the pig's throat. They caught the blood in a basin, offered it to the spirits, and sprinkled it around as they uttered more incantations. I took pictures of the whole affair and I will show them to you when I get them developed.

What makes people do this? Why do primitive people everywhere believe that the life which is involved in that blood belongs somehow to the gods they worship? Well, it reflects a deep-seated conviction, a vestigial inheritance embedded deep in the human heart from the first days of mankind – which is partly truth and partly error. The truth they know is that life is sacred. So primitive people believe that to placate spirits it is not enough just to offer grain or cloth or trinkets or something like that. The spirits are not so easily satisfied. It takes blood – it takes life. But their error is to feel that somehow by this means they can manipulate the spirits, get them to work on their behalf, and that thus man can still remain in control of life.

This is a reflection of the basic lie which is widespread, both in primitive cultures and in civilized nations such as ours, that man is somehow capable of handling life by himself. And in our day we are witnessing a revival of this ancient lie that, even though there are powers greater than man, man can control them, can manipulate them, and make them work for him.

God answers all that by commanding his people to cease these practices and to recognize that he alone is sovereign in life, that he runs the world, and that he controls our lives. We live in his universe, and we cannot handle life ourselves. Therefore, the fundamental truth underlying all behavior everywhere is that we must first recognize that life belongs to God – our own life and every other person's life – and that God is sovereign in these affairs.

The second requirement regarding blood was that **no one was permitted to eat it.** Verses 10-14:

**“If any man of the house of Israel or of the strangers that sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is**

**in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood. Any man also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust.**

**“For the life of every creature is the blood of it; therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.” {Lev 17:11-14 RSV}**

As plainly as he possibly can, God is teaching his people by means of this visual aid that blood has something mysterious and sacred about it, since it is the bearer of life itself. It is only recently that modern medical science has ever understood this great fact. For centuries people regarded blood as not vital to life, and even in relatively recent times blood-letting in the attempt to cure diseases was a common medical practice. Some historians feel that George Washington was practically murdered by his physicians when they kept bleeding him and thus made him too weak to recover from a simple cold. But it is blood that bears life and God has sought to teach this fact by restricting his people from eating it.

Now, if you are of Swedish or German background and grew up eating blood pudding, I don't want you to be disturbed. These restrictions are only shadows which have now passed away, since the reality has come. I am not inveighing against the practice of eating blood pudding. I don't like it, so please don't serve it to me! But if you like it, go ahead and eat it. The New Testament teaches everywhere that these ancient restrictions forbidding certain foods and certain ways of cooking things, and so on, have all been done away with. We are not subject to the shadows of the Old Testament anymore, except as to the reality toward which they point.

So, what is the reality here? It is declared plainly in the words of Jesus recorded in the sixth chapter of John. These words were spoken as our Lord taught in the synagogue at Capernaum. When I was in Israel, on my way to the Philippines,



I drove one beautiful Sunday morning to the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. There I sat on the side of the hill where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount and, overlooking the site of ancient Capernaum, I read these words again, with great blessing to my own heart. Jesus is referring to himself here as the bread of life, the food sent down by God from heaven. And, beginning with Verse 52, John says,

**The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” {John 6:52-56 RSV}**

There is the great reality!

Again, “the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ,” {Gal 3:24 KJV}. These ancient requirements in the Old Testament were but preparatory devices, visual aids, designed by God to prepare people for the proclamation of the truth from the lips of Jesus. And if they had understood this, as God had so carefully and patiently instructed them through the centuries, they would have received these words of Jesus with gladness and joy. But they didn’t understand this principle at all. So you can imagine, in the face of this teaching in Leviticus, how offensive these words were to Jews who had been taught all their lives that it was an abomination to eat blood. And now here comes Jesus who says, “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you. You are dead. But if you do, you abide in me and I in you.” Even his disciples were offended at this. In Verses 60-63 we read:

**Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? [“Are you offended by this?” he said, “You ought to know better.”] Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the**

**flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” {John 6:60-63 RSV}**

What does this all mean? Well, you see, blood is life, this passage in Leviticus tells us, and our Lord was now teaching them the great truth toward which all these restrictions point – that God has provided a new life from which to live, and that to eat the life of a fallen creation is no proper food for God’s people. If you eat the blood of an animal, God is saying, you are partaking of the life of a fallen creation. You are, in a sense, by a figure, feeding upon the life of an animal which is part of a fallen creation. Remember that not only did man fall in the Garden, but all of nature fell with him. The whole natural world is tied to man. Since man is intended to have dominion over it, the natural world fell when man fell. In his letter to the Romans Paul argues that nature is subject to wrath because of man and that it is now travailing and groaning in anguish, waiting for the curse to be lifted which came upon it when man fell {cf, Rom 8:19-23}.

God is patiently trying to teach us that we are no longer to depend upon that fallen life, what we call “the flesh,” the old life, the old method of operating. The resources that we lived by and depended upon before we became Christians – our personality, our training and education, our good looks, whatever we counted on – are no longer to be our resources. They are natural resources and to partake of them is wrong for a believer. That is what God is teaching. We are not to feed on a fallen life, for God has provided a new life, the life of Christ, imparted to us and now part of us. And that is a proper life – a God-intended, God-provided life – proper food. Therefore he who eats this life, drinks this blood, as Jesus said, “has eternal life,” is operating on God’s intended provision.

We eat and drink of this life whenever we draw upon the life of Jesus for strength to love someone who is not very lovely, or for patience when we are irritated and hard-pressed, or for kindness when we don’t feel very good. If, in any moment of demand we reckon upon his life, then we are drinking his blood and eating his flesh. When we do that, his life is flowing in us and Christ is at work in us. That is the difference. And this is what God is seeking to remind us of. We have a reminder of it in the Lord’s table where, by symbol, we eat of his

flesh and drink of his blood, and that pictures the life we are to live. You can see how God labors to teach this. Anything else, he says, is a curse and if you fall prey to it you will be cut off from among your people, i.e., your life will be of such a character that there will be no observable change from the old life. You will not be living like a Christian. You may be a Christian, but you will not be living the Christian life if you depend on anything else.

Now let's move on to the theme of **sex** in Chapter 18:

Next to the preservation of life the most powerful human drive is sex. And sex, as we are beginning to understand these days, is like a great river which, when it flows quietly between its banks, is a boon and a blessing to mankind. But when it is raging in full flood, inundating the landscape in permissiveness and promiscuity, it is terribly destructive and hurtful. And so God's Word is careful to regulate us and help us in this area. It is amazing that God takes the risk of letting us have this fantastic power in our lives. He doesn't take sex away from us if we misuse it. He takes that risk with us, with a plea to us that we learn to keep it within its banks. That is the way this chapter starts:

**And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, I am the LORD your God. [That is, you can trust me.] You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. [All the nations have gone astray.] You shall do my ordinances and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. [That is, trust me!] You shall therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances, by doing which a man shall live: I am the LORD." {Lev 18:1-5 RSV}**

You can see how God underscores the purpose of these instructions. They are to make you live, not die – not be restricted, not narrowed and hemmed in and prohibited from expressing yourself. No, quite the contrary! They are in order that you might live, might enjoy life to the fullest degree, might find it whole and rich.

So God instructs us, now, in this area of sex and here we learn truth about sex that you will

never learn by reading the book *All You Have Ever Wanted to Know About Sex \*but Have Been Afraid to Ask*. There is a lot here that is not in that book. I have read the book and found it very shallow. The author doesn't know very much about sex. He documents a few obscure sexual practices I hadn't heard about previously, but he gives very little information about what sex is and what it is for. Like every other worldly book about sex, this one doesn't tell you very much. It is very distorted.

But here in Scripture you get the truth about sex. All through the Scriptures we are taught that sex is to be a total union of a man and his wife, expressing physical, emotional, and spiritual oneness. That is what sex is all about. It is a total union. Therefore marriage is its only possible expression – anything else immediately becomes abortive and hurtful because the union cannot be total outside of marriage. No way!

So, you see, sex with the wrong person is always harmful. And the most harmful of all, according to this passage, is sex with those who are near of kin. That is what God goes on to warn his people about, beginning with Verse 6:

**"None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to him to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home or born abroad. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness." {Lev 18:6-10 RSV}**

The section goes right on, covering the cases of all the relatives and in-laws. The phrase which is used repeatedly here, "uncover nakedness," is a Biblical euphemism which designates the total act of sex, especially including sexual arousal, preliminary fore-play. Even that is prohibited because it is harmful. There is to be no sexual arousal practiced with anyone who falls into these categories.

By reading this section carefully and comparing it with other passages which deal with sex we can perceive two basic reasons for this prohibition:

- First, genetically, as we well know, sex with relatives which results in procreation inevitably intensifies weaknesses in the family strain. The royal families of Europe are not very healthy because they have been intermarrying within their near of kin relationships for centuries and are now so closely intermarried that there is much physical weakness among them. And laws everywhere forbid incest. There is a recognition on the part of governments that society is injured by sexual relationships resulting in children between those of close kin.
- And, second, psychologically, to have sex or even to arouse passion in one who is near of kin is to have a form of sex with oneself. As the passage indicates, nearness of kin is closeness to self. The “nakedness” of relatives is related to our own “nakedness.” And sex with oneself, in any form, apparently violates a kind of protective shield which is intended by God to keep the race from demonic invasion. We don’t understand much about human life. We are really very, very ignorant about what happens in human relationships, and that is where these words can be of great help to us. You need only read the scriptural passages that deal with sex to realize that there is a tie between illicit sexual practices and openness to demonic influence. This is why God warns again and again throughout the Scriptures that nations or individuals who give themselves over to widespread sexual laxity are opening themselves to the most destructive, pernicious, demonic activity.

When a proper regard for the sexual limitations prescribed by God is broken down, the barrier which protects mankind from the unseen forces of darkness which surround us is vitiated and demonic invasion can then occur very easily. This is what destroys a race. A nation begins to fall apart at that point. Society comes apart at the seams. You only need to read the first chapter of Romans to see how inevitable is the decay and the decline. And it moves rapidly into other forms of violations and perversions, as this passage goes on to specify: Verses 19-23:

**“You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness.** [That is an inordinate sexual demand, even within the marriage relationship.] **And you shall not lie carnally with your neighbor’s wife, and defile yourself with her.** [That is adultery.] **You shall not give any of your children to devote them by fire to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.** [That was an offering of infants to the fiery iron god, Molech. They actually laid children in the heated arms of the image of the god so that the children were cremated alive. This was demon worship and evidently it was regarded as some form of sexual act.] **You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.** [That is homosexuality.] **And you shall not lie with any beast and defile yourself with it, neither shall any woman give herself to a beast to lie with it: it is perversion.”** [That is, bestiality.] {Lev 18:19-23 RSV}

All these practices, the Bible suggests, provide open doors to the destruction of the race, and of the individuals involved, because they open people’s lives to demonic influence. The spirits of darkness which are waiting to move into humanity to possess it, individually and corporately, are given purchase, are given foothold by loose sexual practice. Thus satanic influence grows, and oppression and mental illness and all the other accompaniment of demonic activity creeps into the race.

The end result of this process is given in Verses 24-30:

**“Do not defile yourselves by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am casting out before you defiled themselves; and the land became defiled, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for all of these abominations the men of the land did, who were before you, so that the land became defiled); lest the land vomit you out, when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For whoever shall do any of these abominations, the**

**persons that do them shall be cut off from among their people. So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs which were practiced before you, and never to defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.” {Lev 18:24-30 RSV}**

How tenderly God deals with his people! How graciously and faithfully he warns them that by violating his statutes they will only destroy themselves and that the ultimate effect of sexual looseness is ecological disaster.

Now that is an amazing revelation! And it shows how little we understand life. We are so ignorant of our own humanity and of the way we are tied together and affect each other by what we do – whether other people know about what we do or not. Especially have we been ignorant of the way in which all humanity relates ultimately to the land – God never forgets that. Man does.

I wonder if there aren't young people here with us this morning who really have never had occasion to stop to think whether milk actually comes in cardboard cartons. It doesn't, of course. It comes from a cow, who eats grass. And bread doesn't come in loaves wrapped in waxed paper. It comes from grain grown on the land. Cities have a way of removing us from the land and we forget that we are a people totally dependent upon the soil. All human life stems directly from the land and is intimately related to the natural world.

And God says that there is a tie between wrongful sexual practices and ecological disaster. When sexual practices are wrong, demonic influence twists the thinking of men and they do things to the land which turns it against its inhabitants. The expressive figure that God uses is that the land is defiled and it “vomits out” the people – it can't stand them anymore. It rejects them.

If you think that the ecological crisis we are undergoing today – the widespread pollution and the destruction of our natural resources – is due to the population explosion, you are very, very wrong, because there have been ecological disasters for millennia before now in human history. Here in this passage is the record of one. The inhabitants of the land of Canaan were cast out beforehand by the land itself because of the sexual looseness of the people. And there are many records of similar ecological disasters in human history – long before there was a worldwide population boom. It isn't

population explosion that creates the disaster. No, the reason for it is that man in his ignorance of life does not understand the things that unite us to the land and to nature.

We would never think that our harmful sexual practices have something to do with our ecological crisis. But God, in his infinite knowledge of human affairs, knows that there is a tie and he tells us faithfully and honestly, “If you go on in the way you are going, sexually, the land will become repulsed by you. You will violate it and destroy it, despite your best intentions, and it will reject you. You will no longer be able to sustain yourself upon it.”

So, the impending ecological and economic disaster our nation is facing is directly traceable to the sexual permissiveness that we have indulged in, and to our creation of wrongful attitudes toward sex. It never occurs to us that there is a tie between *Playboy* and pollution, but it is there. God sees it and he is faithful to tell us these things.

We wouldn't understand all this if he didn't reveal it to us. And we cannot find our way out by ourselves. Nature reflects only the ravaged and ruined condition of the spirit of man. And as society falls apart in direct disobedience to what God has said – ignoring the gracious provision of a Redeemer, of a Savior, who offers a whole way of life that is entirely different, and a different power to live by – our nation becomes infiltrated with demonic thought, twisted satanic lies, delusions and illusions, and the land becomes increasingly defiled and sick. Ultimately, unless we have a national change of heart, it will vomit out its inhabitants.

God's word, of course, is always the same: Repent, think it over, think again – especially the people of God – and believe! Remember, God alone can handle life. God alone can master our sexual desires. And he is ready and graciously waiting to provide what we need, so that we might live a whole, full, abundant life.

### **Prayer:**

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the revelation of your truth. How penetrating it is! How deep and profound it is! How it goes below the shallow thinking of the leaders of thought of our day and ties together things that we would think are quite disparate. We ask you, Lord, to help us to

understand this, and to enable us to be an island of righteousness in the midst of a sea of iniquity, “to shine as lights in the midst of a generation of crooks and perverts” {cf, Phil 2:15} – not because we are any better

in ourselves, Lord – we know we aren’t – but simply because by your grace you have opened our eyes and have taught us the truth. We ask in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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## Power to Do

by Ray C. Stedman

This week someone expressed to me a little disappointment that we are still studying Leviticus. He suggested that perhaps we might move on soon to more captivating portions of Scripture. I would like to say two things about that. One is that I understand the feeling. I often feel that way myself and so I can identify. I have often felt the sense of wanting to move on to passages which perhaps are newer or more exciting in some way, especially when, as in this latter portion of Leviticus, we come to the whole realm of behavior. These “do’s” and “don’ts” can seem a little tiresome, I grant you. These irksome details which concern our own behavior and our relationships with one another are sometimes rather difficult to handle and so we’d like to move on to other matters.

But I would like to say something else too. I have found in my own life that it is wise to deal with this attitude because in some ways it is self-deceiving. We need to remind ourselves that this book of Leviticus is the word of the living God, just as much as John 3:16 or any other portion of Scripture more greatly loved. Infinite wisdom took infinite pains to give us this book for our own instruction, for our own benefit, and we need it very, very much. This book, as you know, is one of the books of the Bible which has been largely ignored by God’s people. It has become quite unexpected that “anything good can come out of Leviticus.” And tremendous blessing has been lost as a result. For there is a great deal to be learned here. This is the word of God to us. And if we believe what we so often quote from Paul’s letter to Timothy: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness [right living]” {2 Tim 3:16 KJV}, then we must acknowledge that this passage is part of that “all scripture.”

So let’s look at the rest of the book (there are not too many studies left) as part of the tender discipline toward us of a loving Father. I have found that impatience with regard to the Scriptures is often disguised to mean: “I understand all this, and I’m tired of it, so let’s move on,” when what it really means is: “I understand it, and I don’t like it, and don’t want to do it.” If that is the case, then, of course, we need to correct our attitude. Mark Twain said,

“It isn’t the portions of the Bible which I don’t understand that bother me; it’s the ones I do!”

In Chapters 19 & 20, to which we now come, we have a series of miscellaneous instructions covering various situations and problems of daily life that were faced by the people of God in that day and, at one level or another, which we face in our own lives today. Each of these would be worthy of an entire sermon in its own right. We could spend the next year right in these two chapters because each item of instruction develops a basic principle which is fundamental to our lives. But this morning we will make just a quick survey:

- First I want to comment on the striking format in which these instructions are given to us. There is something very unusual about these chapters that I would like to highlight for you.
- Then I’d like to point out the two types of prohibitions which are given here.
- Finally we will examine the two truths about man and God which are revealed in these chapters.

That will be our program.

Notice a **very remarkable phenomenon** which occurs again and again throughout these chapters. It is the way God links his own name with these instructions. For instance, look at Verses 1-4:

**And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods: I am the LORD your God.” {Lev 19:1-4 RSV}**

Then skip over to Verse 11:

**“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.**

**“You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.” {Lev 19:11-14 RSV}**

Then look at the closing section of Chapter 20, beginning with the last part of Verse 24:

**“I am the LORD your God, who have separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean beast and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” {Lev 20:24b-26 RSV}**

Note how carefully God identifies himself with each one of these instructions. He signs his name, as it were, after each one. He gives us a practical admonition and then says, “I am the LORD your God.” The name he uses here is his covenant name: “I am *Jehovah*.” That is, “I am the Living One, the Eternal One, the Sufficient One. I am the

God who is Enough.” That is what *Jehovah* means.

What is God trying to impart to us by this format? Two things are involved: The first is *authority*, and the second is resource. That is what he is underscoring.

You see, the Israelites would read this, “I am the LORD your God” – as distinct from any other gods, the gods of other peoples around them. Remember that in Chapter 18 the LORD had said, “You shall not live as they do in Egypt,” and “You shall not live as they do in Canaan” {cf, Lev 18:3}. That is, “The Egyptians and the Canaanites have their own ways of life, their own standards of living, but not you, because of the relationship you have with me: for I am the LORD *your* God.”

This underscores something very important. It is that we must discover how to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and error, on the basis of what God says – if we are in relationship to him. There is a totally different standard for the people of God.

This is very practical, because God is reality. What God says and what he sees and how he looks at life is the way life is. If you look at it in some other way, then you are being unrealistic. You are out of step with reality and are trying to live according to an illusion, a fantasy, a figment of your imagination. Such ideas and standards may be widespread, as they were in Egypt and Canaan. There may be lies which are believed sincerely and devotedly by people around you and which govern their way of living. But God is saying, “Not for you. Not for my people. I am your God, and I am telling you the truth, the way life is, what will hurt you and what will not. So believe me, because I am the LORD your God.”

That is so important to understand these days! There has never been a time when proper standards of life are so challenged as they are today. A thousand voices are shouting at us, telling us conflicting ideas and differing philosophies. How are you to know which is right, which one to follow? Well, not by looking around you, by referring to the way others are thinking, or writing, or living in your vicinity, nor by espousing the general philosophy of the age. People are telling us today that there is no right and wrong, that it is all relative. Nothing is hurtful in itself; it is only the way you think that makes it so. You have to change your way of

thinking. But you see how this passage cuts right across that. What God has said must be your authority. God is saying to these people of old, as he says to us today, “Look, I am the LORD your God, and I am telling you the truth. This is the way life is.” God himself must be your basic authority for life.

One of the reasons why the church has become so weak and ineffectual in the world today is that it has forgotten this simple principle. It has ignored the fact that it must exercise its life by means of its relationship with a living God in order to change the nations around it. The “Egyptians and the Canaanites” may be able to make a very rational, reasonable-sounding case for their mode of life, but, if God says something else, then that is what is right, because he is the ultimate basis of life. We live in his universe and we must conform to his design for it. Any other approach to life bespeaks an unwillingness to face life as it really is.

This week I had a long phone conversation with a young man who is falling victim to one of the many false prophets of our day, a so-called “psychic counselor.” This young man was being told that he could discover hidden and marvelous powers of his personality, secret reservoirs of strength lying undiscovered in his human life, through a knowledge of the stars and other astral bodies and of the philosophies of some of the leaders of occult thought in our day and in the past. He had experimented with this and, sure enough, it had seemed to release him in certain areas. It was obvious that he was being sucked in by a whole line of thinking which is basically contrary to the Word of God. And yet he was convinced that he had found a marvelous person with unusual power and ability to see into the human mind and heart and to bring to bear on his life remarkable, strange, and mysterious power that could give him a sense of liberty and freedom such as he had never known before. He was finding the claims of this individual true to some extent. It was very difficult for me to challenge that with him. None of these sorts of notions would have any appeal to the human mind if there weren’t at least a modicum of truth to them. But I struggled to show him that these teachings were in direct contradiction to the authority of Jesus Christ, that, in the Scriptures, Jesus taught something else. That was where I rested my case. The issue he had to decide was whose authority

would he accept, that of these cultists or that of the Lord Jesus.

All of life ultimately reduces to this question of authority. None of us knows enough about life to make all our own decisions. We cannot live long enough and have sufficiently broad experience to have an adequate basis. We sometimes kid ourselves to think we do. We say, “I want to make up my own mind.” And we can, in some limited areas, but we can never live on that basis because we never can know enough. Ultimately we must begin to accept a lot of the precepts by which we will live on the basis of what someone else has said. So here is the great issue of our day:

- What is the ultimate authority?
- Whom are you going to follow?
- Whom will you ultimately believe?

In this passage, God is helping his people, whom he loves, to see that he himself is the ultimate authority, that he is their God, and that he loves them and will tell them the truth about life – even if they don’t like it. That is why it is so dangerous to challenge the authority of Scripture. When you face the ultimate issues of the Bible, it is not just good advice being given to you; it is a revelation of the way life is, of the way the universe is run. The reason why I am a Christian is not simply that I prefer it, as opposed to some other philosophy or religion. It is because I am convinced that this is the only explanation of the universe, and of life, that makes sense. And this is what God is saying by linking his divine name with these commands: “Here is the truth. I am the LORD your God.”

But he is not only authority; he is also *resource*. This is the second reason why he gives his name right along with each command. He says, “Do this, or don’t do that: I am the LORD your God.”

What does he mean? He means, “I am available to you. I am the strength by which you can do what I command. I never tell you to do something without making available to you the power to do it.”

Have you discovered what Paul discovered and recorded for us in Romans 7 – that you cannot do all the things you’d like to do and know you ought to do, that you want to but somehow cannot? Of course all of us have areas of life which we know



are not right and which, when we see them, we can change. And we do change them, and that deceives us into thinking that we can change in all areas if only we want to badly enough. But if you think this then you are quite wrong, because there are areas of life that you cannot change by your own effort, no matter how hard you try. This is the way Paul puts it, from his own experience: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate," {cf, Rom 7:18-20}.

I'm convinced that Paul was a golfer, because whenever I play golf, that's the way I feel. I know what to do – I've been shown many times by pros – but I don't do it! And I don't have any more control over certain areas of my moral life than I do over my physical life. There are things that I can't do, even though I want to. Have you found that to be true?

Have you ever had the experience of having someone in your life who sabotages your best intentions all the time? Somehow they irritate you. You can get along well with everybody else, but when you are with that person something they say or do just rubs you the wrong way and you get resentful or lose your temper. And you simply can't seem to attain victory over the situation. Have you ever said to yourself, "Well, I'm going to handle this quietly and calmly now. I'm not going to let him get to me this time. I'm going to be calm and collected and keep my cool." And you have marvelous, imaginary visions of what is going to happen the next time, how absolutely unruffled you are going to be, how completely undisturbed by their strange and sinister words and approaches. You get into the situation and for awhile it goes along well and you do keep cool. But then sooner or later, sure enough, they say something aggravating and you begin to simmer and burn. Soon you just can't take it anymore and you let them have it! Then you are immediately remorseful. "Why did I do that again? I meant to handle it so differently." It's usually your children, isn't it, who provoke you to that? Or your parents? Well, that is what Paul is talking about.

And Paul says further, "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it," {Rom 7:18b RSV}. If you feel that way, God understands that. It is the most common problem of life. What you are lacking is power, the power to respond. You must learn that there is another source of power, that you can

reckon on "the God who is there," the God who is available to you. And that is why God signs his name this way again and again. "Here is something to do, or not to do: I am the LORD your God – standing here, available to you, ready for you to draw upon my strength. When you start drawing on it you can do, or not do, what I command by the power of an available God, the God who is Enough. I am *Jehovah*."

If you understand this process by which life is to be lived, then you no longer can say, "I can't," in any situation. This is why Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," {cf, Phil 4:13}. If you understand that process and you still say, "I can't," then "I can't," has become a disguise for "I won't." That is the problem – not "I can't," but, "I don't want to!" And God never changes your will – you must do that. You have to choose to do what God wants. But the secret is to do it on the basis of the power he is ready to supply to you. You must do the choosing, but he will do the supplying. When you choose to act on that basis, then power to act flows to you and through you – immediately.

Isn't that what Isaiah is talking about in Chapter 40 of his book? "They who wait upon the LORD [they who expect God to act] shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint," {Isa 40:31 RSV}. That is God's method of living. If you are not living on that basis then you are not living the Christian life. That alone is Christianity as God intended it. This is what we call the "New Covenant ministry," but here it is in the Old Testament, just as much as in the New. God is seeking to instruct his people that he is the power by which they are to act.

Now we need to examine the **two types of prohibitions** given in these passages. Let's look at the instructions themselves, or at certain of their characteristics. We can't take the time to go over all of them, but will just take a few samples. They fall into two general classes:

First, there are *certain acts and attitudes* which are inherently wrong, and prohibitions against them are eternally binding upon the people of God. As you read through this passage you can see that there are some things which, no matter whether you are living under the provisions of the

Old Testament or New Testament, are always wrong and always to be avoided, by means of the strength that God gives. Read Verses 15-18 in Chapter 19:

**“You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. [That is always right, never passes away.] You shall not go up and down as a slanderer [talebearer] among your people [you shall not be the neighborhood gossip; that never changes], and you shall not stand forth against the life [literally, the blood] of your neighbor [i.e., you shall not seek to get rid of him by conjuring up some false story about him so that he gets run out of the neighborhood. What does that say about racial prejudice, among other things?]: I am the LORD. You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: ...”** {Lev 19:15-18a RSV}

Did you know that was in the Old Testament? You find those words quoted from the lips of Jesus in the New Testament, but here they are in the book of Leviticus, under the Law: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD,” God said. These words never go out of date.

There are certain other prohibitions here which also are eternally binding, but the penalty for their violation is no longer in effect, because of the grace of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. For instance, Verses 12-16 in Chapter 20:

**“If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death; they have committed incest, their blood is upon them. If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. [These are always wrong, but here the penalty was death.] If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is wickedness; they shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you. If a man lies with a beast, he shall be put to**

**death; and you shall kill the beast. If a woman approaches any beast and lies with it, you shall kill the woman and the beast; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.”** {Lev 20:12-16 RSV}

That is an interesting paragraph, in view of the recent action of the California Supreme Court to abolish the death penalty. Here God insisted upon it, said that it was absolutely essential, because that was the only way of impressing upon these people the seriousness of these evils. They were commonly accepted by the people around them. Practically everyone among the Canaanites and the Egyptians was living like that. But God said, in effect, “You mustn’t do any of these things because they are very, very damaging. They will destroy you as individuals and as a people. Therefore, in order to show you how serious these are, you must put to death those who do them. That will shock people, awaken them to how damaging this kind of evil can be.”

These things are just as damaging today as they ever were. But the remedy, the degree of punishment, is no longer the same. God has come in, in Christ, and has graciously mitigated the penalty, and has provided the opportunity for repentance and change. We no longer need to require death for these offenses, and I want to state very emphatically that I am not arguing that the death penalty should be applied to them. But there is a purpose for the death penalty. Applied in the right circumstances it has very great validity. But here, though these deeds are as wrong as ever, the penalty is changed – and quite properly so. It is mitigated by grace.

The second general class of prohibitions in this passage regards *certain symbolic practices and rituals and ceremonies*. They no longer need to be observed, but the attitude which they illustrate never changes. So underlying each item in this category is an unchangeable truth. For instance, consider Verse 19 in Chapter 19:

**“You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff.”** {Lev 19:19 RSV}

How many of you are observing that last law? You're all lawbreakers, aren't you? Almost all garments today are made of mixed stuff, of blends of natural and synthetic fibers. A literal adherence to this stricture is no longer of any significance, because it is dealing with substances which never were inherently wrong. Whenever God employs things symbolically and says that something connected with them is wrong, they are no longer tended to be taken literally but are meant to illustrate attitudes of mind and heart which are dangerous. The Israelites had to obey these literally, because that is how they learned what these attitudes were. But as we study them now we need to understand that God is teaching in a graphic way here that there are certain unmixable principles which are unalterably opposed to one another and that we are not to try to put the two together.

As an example, a believer in Christ should not marry an unbeliever, the New Testament says. To do so is to mix two ways of life which are categorically separated and this only creates confusion and hardship and pressure and problems. Therefore it is very important that a believer not marry an unbeliever. This is an application of the teaching of this kind of truth in our present life.

Similar prohibitions are found in Chapter 19, Verses 26-28:

**“You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not practice augury or witchcraft. You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD.” {Lev 19:26-28 RSV}**

The Israelites were to observe all this very literally, because God was teaching an attitude of heart by these external restrictions. Some of these things are eternally wrong while others are wrong only symbolically.

First, they were not to eat flesh with blood in it, as we saw in our last study, because the blood is the life of the flesh, and the life belongs to God. What God wants his people to learn is that life can never be handled properly unless it is related to God. Everything in life must relate to God. That is the great truth illustrated here. The New Testament clearly tells us that these restrictions on food

are shadows which have passed away. But the meaning abides.

The meaning of the rest of the section is given in the next sentence. “You shall not practice augury or witchcraft.” There is nothing symbolic about that. That is eternally wrong, because it exposes you to demonic powers which can influence your mind and, though you may be unwitting of what is happening, can gradually seize your personality and possess it. Therefore God warns against this.

The practices which follow were simply part of the pagan ceremonies which accompanied their witchcraft and augury. They cut their hair and beards in certain ways, and cut and tattooed their bodies. These things are not wrong in themselves today unless, of course, they are connected with practices which lead into pagan worship and control by demons. That is what God, in love, labors to prevent.

One other example of this sort of prohibition which is rather outstanding is found in the first five verses of Chapter 20:

**The LORD said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, Any man of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his children to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. I myself will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name. And if the people of the land do at all hide their eyes from that man, when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his family, and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in playing the harlot after Molech.” {Lev 20:1-5 RSV}**

As we saw in our last study, Molech was a fertility god, represented by a great iron or stone statue which was heated until white-hot by a fire built within it. People would take their infants and lay them in the outstretched arms of this idol and stand by as the children screamed in agony, cremated alive as an offering to Molech. Why would parents do a thing like that? – because they believed that this would increase the yield of their

crops, and therefore their own prosperity. God was not only intent upon ending this cruel practice, with its insane sacrifice of human life in this horrendous manner, but what he really wants to convey is the evil of the principle involved: parents sacrificing their children for their own benefit.

When you read this that way you can see that many parents are offering their children to Molech today. Lots of parents are sacrificing their children on the altar of their own ego, in order that they might have the pleasant things of life. They give up their responsibility to love their children, and to spend time with them and raise them. They shunt them off to baby sitters and boarding schools to be raised, so that they (the parents) might work longer and make more money so that they can enjoy a higher standard of living. And the children wind up terribly, grievously scarred by this neglect. How is that any different from offering your child to Molech? That is what God says is wrong – that you are willing to sacrifice your children on the altar of parental pride, and let them suffer in order that you might be more prosperous.

In these chapters there are **two great revelations concerning God and man**, and with these we close:

The first is the revelation of *the enormity of the evil of which man is capable*. Consider again just Verse 14 of Chapter 19:

**“You shall not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling block before the blind.” {Lev 19:14a RSV}**

Why would anybody want to do that? But God does not issue these warnings unnecessarily. He knows the depravity of which the human heart is capable.

And how many of us have felt impatient because somebody couldn't quite hear us and so we have had to repeat our words in a louder voice? Soon we have found ourselves muttering against them under our breath. What is that but cursing the deaf?

Who would put a stumbling block before a blind person? Well, it's amazing what humans, even children, will do to just amuse themselves. None of us is guiltless of these sorts of evils.

What does this reveal? It reveals what God seeks constantly to tell us that there isn't one of

these things of which the flesh in any one of us is not capable. Winston Churchill, writing his record of history, said that he was impressed by the fact that human nature has never changed. He put it something like this:

“Modern man, despite all the veneer of civilization, when put in the proper circumstances and under the proper conditions, will do anything – and his modern wife will back him up.”

But, in contrast, look at *the tender, loving concern of God* for the weak, the poor, and the strangers. Read these words from Verses 9-10 of Chapter 19:

**“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.” {Lev 19:9-10 RSV}**

That is, “Don't greedily grab everything that you can lay your hands on and try to take it for yourself. Leave some for someone else. There are those who haven't had your opportunities, and they need help, too.”

You can see how tenderly concerned God is for the poor. Remember how beautifully this is brought out in the book of Ruth. Ruth returned to the land as a poor woman without a family and gleaned in the field of Boaz. Boaz instructed his reapers, “Drop a few handfuls on purpose for her,” {cf, Ruth 2:15-16}. Of course, she was a beautiful woman – that helped! But he was simply obeying this admonition of the Law not to glean everything from the field but to leave something for the poor. Generosity is to be our mark.

Then look at Verses 32-33:

**“You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.**

**When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. [Do not take advantage of him.] The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land**

**of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” {Lev 19:32-34 RSV}**

Do you see what a high standard is set for us?

Let’s close with these words of Jesus from his Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in the sixth chapter of Luke. How instructive they are! This is God’s level of life. This is where Christians are to live:

**“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you. For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. [You are no different from anybody else, if this is the height of your morality.] But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. [Therefore] Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” {Luke 6:32-36 RSV}**

The same standard of life is proclaimed in the Old Testament as in the New. God’s character is to be revealed through his children, by the power of an available God, ready to live through us to do these things. We can’t do them by ourselves. But God stands ready to do them in us, as we draw upon his grace and strength.

#### **Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for these truths. We ask you to instruct us deeply in them and impress them upon our minds and hearts. Help us to see that simply being moral, being fair to someone else and treating them as they treat us, is not the level of life upon which you expect us to live. Your level is much higher. We are to be loving in return for evil. We can do that only by the grace that is in you, Lord Jesus. Help us to obey you in this and to expect to see your life at work in us. We ask in your name, Amen.

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## Free to Serve

by Ray C. Stedman

In *'the Gospel according to Leviticus,'* we come today to a section which is specifically addressed to priests, to Aaron the high priest and his sons. This family, as you know, was set aside in Israel to do a specific work of ministry in relationship to God. All the members of Aaron's family were priests by birth. They did not become priests by choice or by desire on their part, but by being born into the family of Aaron. There was no other way to become a priest. No other family was ever recognized as having valid membership in the priesthood.

But even though they were members of the family of Aaron they could serve as priests only if they met certain qualifications. So there is a difference between merely being a priest and serving as a priest. That is important and instructive to us because, as we have seen, this priesthood of the family of Aaron is a picture of the ministry that we have uniquely as believers in Jesus Christ. Every one of us who is born again, born into the family of our great high priest Jesus Christ, is by that fact inescapably a priest. But whether we can serve as a priest or not depends upon the qualifications in our life. Membership in the family is by birth; service in the family is by qualification.

This is highlighted in a quotation from a classic treatment of the first five books of the Bible called *The Notes on the Pentateuch* by a Plymouth Brethren author who uses only his initials, C.H.M. This is what he says:

Every child of God is a priest. He is enrolled as a member of Christ's priestly house. He may be very ignorant, but his position as a priest is not founded upon knowledge but upon life. His experience may be very shallow, but his place as a priest does not depend

upon experience but upon life. His capacity may be very limited, but his relationship as a priest does not rest upon an enlarged capacity but upon life. He was born into the position and relationship of a priest. He did not work himself thereinto. It was not by any efforts of his own that he became a priest; he became a priest by birth. The spiritual priesthood, together with all the spiritual functions attaching thereunto, is the necessary appendage to spiritual birth. The capacity to enjoy the privileges and to discharge the functions of a position must not be confounded with the position itself. They must ever be kept distinct. Relationship is one thing; capacity is quite another.

That distinction was made regarding the sons of Aaron and it is true also of us. When you became a Christian by faith in Jesus Christ, you also became a priest, with great privileges and functions, which we will examine in a moment. But you cannot exercise that priesthood, and enjoy those privileges, and reap the benefit and excitement of the ministry, unless you fulfill certain qualifications which these chapters set before us. When the Old Testament pictures us here as priests, it is talking primarily about that aspect of our life which concerns ministry to others, our outreach – either to other Christians or to non-believers.

We are all priests by virtue of being Christians, but

- how good a priest we are,
- how much we enjoy the ministry committed to us, and
- how effective we are in it

depends upon our qualifications.

The **ministry of a priest** is summarized up for us in Verse 6 of Chapter 21:

**“They shall be holy to their God, and not profane the name of their God; for they offer the offerings by fire to the LORD, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy.” {Lev 21:6 RSV}**

Priests did two things: they offered the offerings, the sacrifices, and they offered the bread, the showbread, before God in the tabernacle.

This is directly applicable to us and very significant, because we have exactly the same ministry on the spiritual level. As we learn from the New Testament, these Levitical practices are shadows, pictures, symbols, which speak of our own ministry: To offer the offerings is to deal with the effects of the death of Jesus. Those animal sacrifices represent the death of the Lord Jesus. Every lamb, every calf, every goat that was slain in the Old Testament was a picture of the work of Christ upon the cross in giving up his life on behalf of his own. And to offer these sacrifices was to apply this work, in type, to the individuals who brought them.

What does that mean to us?

- It is given to us, as believers in Jesus Christ, to apply the work of Christ to people who are in desperate trouble around us – both other Christians and non-Christians as well. We are to do so by sharing the truth of the word of God with them, the facts that God has declared in the gospel, and thus to deliver them from the burden of guilt for their sins and to set them free from the power of evil in their lives, from habits that enslave them and blind them and inhibit them in so many ways, and to bring them forth into freedom and health and liberty. The death of Jesus, the blood of Christ, is what cuts off the hurtfulness and the sinfulness of human life. It is the only solution to the problem of human evil. Therefore every problem which stems from self-centeredness, self-sufficiency, evil at work in your life and mine, is to be dealt with by the death of Christ – the understanding of it, the belief in it, the acceptance of it personally, and the appropriation of it. Helping people in this is the job of a priest, and exciting work it is!

Have you ever had the privilege of helping someone in this way – someone you have come to know or to love but who is troubled, blinded, who is discouraged, depressed, defeated, who has fallen into a morass of evil thoughts and attitudes and activities which are destroying him or her? Have you had the privilege of setting them free with a word of release and helping them see what God has done for them? The lifting of guilt, the freeing from sin, the deliverance from the power of evil in human affairs, the healing touch, the freeing, delivering Word – only this will help, and this is our ministry, yours as well as mine, to help people wherever we find them, whoever they are. That is the privilege given to us as priests. That is what we are here for – to minister to others in this way.

- The priests were also to offer bread. They themselves were to eat of the showbread, the loaves that were baked in the tabernacle, and they were to offer this before God along with the animal offerings. Bread speaks of strength and of life. This is a beautiful picture, as we have already seen, of feeding upon the available life of a risen Lord, of taking from him the strength we need to be patient, to be cheerful and joyful, to be quiet and understanding and loving and wise. So here you have in view both the death and the life of Christ – the blood that was shed, and the bread upon which we feed day by day.

All this is beautifully symbolized by the Lord’s table. We have here blood and bread, just as in this text. The work of priests is to administer the blood and the bread. Here is a wonderful study of what it means when we take the cup and eat the bread. It is certainly not a magic, hocus-pocus act that makes something religious happen to us. It is a recognition that we understand these great principles – that it is the application of the death of Jesus Christ which sets us free from all that once enslaved us or still does enslave us or hinder us, and that it is his life available to us which we feed upon and which strengthens us, restores us and gives us hope again, renews our walk and encourages our heart and picks up our spirits and makes us able to go on.

From time to time we have people sitting here in these services (perhaps there are some this

morning) who are right at the very limits of their endurance. They are confronted with problems which are so oppressive, so demanding, so terribly pressuring that they are ready to take their own lives. Again and again it has been my privilege as a priest to speak a word which has released them and relieved them and strengthened them again, and they have told me about it afterward. I take joy in that ministry, but my ministry is no different than yours. You have the same privilege – perhaps not in as public a way, though some of you may have that as well. It is our calling, and high privilege, to do what no other people can do in this world today – to set people free in these ways. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that every one of us share this ministry together.

That is what makes life exciting! I had lunch this week with an outstanding businessman who is a captain of industry with literally thousands of people under his supervision and who makes tremendous decisions which involve tens of thousands of people. Yet he spent the whole lunch time telling me of his excitement in ministering in ways which helped people out of their depression and enabled them to solve their problems. That is what was exciting to him. All the demands of his company and the challenges of his work were nothing as compared with the joy of ministering. That is what makes life full and satisfying, complete and worthwhile. I hope that you appreciate your priesthood and your ministry, because God has called us to this.

In order to exercise this priesthood, a priest must be holy. This is what God says: “They shall be holy to their God, and not profane the name of their God; [then he says what it is they are to do]; therefore they shall be holy,” {Lev 21:6 RSV}. Once again let me remind you that this word *holy*, like so many other words from the Bible, has been twisted and distorted in our thinking so that it is usually taken to mean something which is not very attractive. We are likely to think that being holy is to be long-faced and solemn and sour, but it isn't that at all! *Holiness* means “wholeness.” It means to be healed.

- How can you help someone unless you yourself have been helped?
- How can you encourage someone when your own heart is discouraged and defeated?

- How can you help somebody to cheer up, and be joyful and genuinely glad in the midst of pressure, unless you have learned how to be glad in the midst of pressure and struggle?
- How can you deliver somebody from a loathsome moral sickness if you are a victim of the same thing yourself?
- How can you help somebody who has a blemish in their spiritual life unless you have been delivered from that blemish yourself and thus know how to say the delivering word?

You must be set free first. You must have experienced the joy of God, the life of liberty in the spirit of God, in order to help. You must be whole in the area in which you are attempting to help. You may not be whole in every way, but you must be whole in that area where you are trying to help.

So these two entire chapters deal with this matter of **the wholeness of priests**, in order that they might have a part in the excitement of ministry. Although they are priests by birth they can exercise their ministry only by fulfillment of these qualifications. These passages set forth for us what wholeness consists of, and in what areas need we be free from that which defiles.

The first qualification is given in the first five verses of Chapter 21:

**And the LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them that none of them shall defile himself for the dead among his people, except for his nearest of kin, his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother, or his virgin sister (who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may defile himself). He shall not defile himself as a husband among his people and so profane himself. They shall not make tonsures [abnormal cuttings of the hair] upon their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy to their God, and not profane the name of their God; ...” {Lev 21:1-6a RSV}**

The first limitation upon a priest was that he not defile himself with the dead. You remember



that earlier in this book we saw that it was forbidden for any Israelite to touch a dead body. Or if for some reason he had to, as in the case of those who buried the dead or who accidentally touched a dead body, he was unclean until the evening and had to wash in recognition of the defilement that had come upon him. But for the priests, those who exercised ministry, there was no allowance for any occasion of touching a dead body – except for those near of kin. Not even for his own wife could a priest defile himself. This is all very suggestive and significant.

The touching of a dead body is a picture, the New Testament tells us, of any involvement with the flesh, with the fallen nature, the old life within us, or within others. You remember that Paul says in Romans that the mind of the flesh is death and that they who live according to the flesh are defiled, are at enmity with God, and cannot please him {cf, Rom 8:6-8}. So this is an illustration of the necessity in ministering of avoidance of the flesh – that spirit of self-sufficiency which is inherent in all of humanity and which boasts itself in how capable it is, how able and adequate it is to accomplish things. For those who minister there must be no involvement with this except, and notice how exquisitely accurate Scripture is here, that which is our own flesh. There is in each of us a nature inherited from Adam which is fleshly, and we can't avoid that. You see, those near of kin live with us and picture that which is within us, that with which we are identified. God is very realistic and is not suggesting that we will ever be freed from that in this life. We can't escape it. We are too close to it.

Now, we must deal with it. We can be cleansed from it when it arises, and, of course, we can avoid it by recognizing its appeal and rejecting it, renouncing it in the Spirit, this is true. But there is no way that we can avoid the flesh altogether. There is no way that we can be so spiritual that we never fall into sin. Even the most earnestly dedicated Christian, even the one with the best of intentions and the most determination to walk in the Spirit, is going to be tripped up some time or other by his own crafty, tricky, wily, deceitful flesh. And when that happens we need to deal with it, and honestly admit it, and not try to hide it and pretend that it isn't there, and call it some fancy name to try to make it seem to smell a little better when it is really nothing but the old flesh. The flesh never

dies, but it goes on smelling that way. This we must recognize, and remember. Though on occasion we are going to be defiled, the Scriptures teach, our ministry will not be permanently affected so long as it is our flesh that has tripped us up and we cleanse ourselves from it.

But the chief warning here is against being in contact with the flesh around us in the world, against adopting the principles, in other words, by which the world operates – with its insistence that it is adequate to handle problems and therefore doesn't need God, with its worldly wisdom, its external and superficial approach to problems, and its emphasis upon activity rather than attitude, outwardness rather than inwardness. This passage is exhorting us not to borrow from the world around us the spirit of the flesh. Don't get involved in those enterprises which rest upon human ambition and dedication and self-motivation – that spirit which says, "I've got what it takes and I can do it. Just watch my speed." That is the flesh. And if you intend to help people you will find that if you try to do it from the standpoint of appealing to their pride in themselves, and so on, you will not set them free. What this Scripture says is that you won't stop being a Christian if you get involved with that, but you will end your ministry. You can't help people in the area of their desperate need, delivering them by the death of Christ, nor can you encourage and build them by the life of Jesus, if these defilements are present.

Notice that this thrust is carried to a deeper level in Verses 7-9:

**“They shall not marry a harlot or a woman who has been defiled; neither shall they marry a woman who has been divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God. You shall consecrate him, for he offers the bread of your God; he shall be holy to you, for I the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy. And the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.” {Lev 21:7-9 RSV}**

Here is a prohibition against forming close alliances, marriages, with that which represents the flesh. Not only is a momentary contact with it forbidden but especially prohibited is any tie, any commitment to it on a long-term basis. This robs the priest of his right to minister. He can no longer

in the power of God apply the death of Christ to deliver people nor can he enrich their lives with the food of God and with the fellowship of the son of God. In other words, this is a severe warning against the idea of picking up the processes and programs of the world and baptizing them, calling them Christian, and going on from there.

This is very instructive. In most of the mission fields I have visited in the last few years the flesh is rampant in the church. Christians there have set aside almost entirely any sense of dependence upon the life of Jesus Christ in them. They seem to know nothing of this and have borrowed almost completely the attitudes and the resources of the world around them to carry on the work of God. They evidently assume that churches are nothing but business organizations to be run like any other business. They buy the world's approaches and depend upon the same resources. They try to influence people in the same way that any non-Christian would. As a result very little is really being accomplished. They are just stumbling and faltering along. And the most horrible thing about it is that they are doing exactly as they were taught by American missionaries! For what is true out there is true here in the United States to a very considerable degree.

But here is God's warning signal raised to say, "Look, if you go about your ministry in this way, no matter how hard you try you will lack my blessing." You may make a very impressive demonstration in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of God and in the accomplishment of his work and his will it will be one hundred percent ineffective. Nothing of eternal value will happen as a result and your own heart will tell you that it is all shallow and empty and useless. This is why the Christian life is often boring to many people. It is because they don't have any real ministry. They are priests but they are not exercising their priesthood. And even though they try, even though they attempt to have a ministry, they cannot do so successfully because God knows the heart. He is not fooled. And where these limitations are being violated no ministry is possible.

The next passage deals with **the high priest**, and here certain further restrictions are given. He is the example to all. As we look at this passage you will remember that our high priest is, of

course, Jesus himself. How beautifully this passage describes the way he lived!

**"The priest who is chief among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil is poured, and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose, nor rend his clothes; he shall not go in to any dead body, nor defile himself, even for his father or for his mother; neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him. I am the LORD. And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or one divorced, or a woman who has been defiled, or a harlot, these he shall not marry; but he shall take to wife a virgin of his own people, that he may not profane his children among his people; for I am the LORD who sanctify him." {Lev 21:10-15 RSV}**

How intensified are these restrictions with respect to the high priest! He cannot defile himself in any way for the dead. That is, he has no contact whatsoever with the flesh. How true this was of the Lord Jesus! He was born without a sinful flesh, and he never in any way identified with it. Notice how this is symbolized. Here are the characteristics of the high priest.

- First, he was to have no loose hair. We have seen in earlier studies that hair is always the picture of beauty. Jesus' beauty was never in disarray. As you look at the record of our great high priest in the Gospels you can see how fully he met his. There was no lack of orderliness or of discipline in the beauty of his life, no looseness. There was never a time when he acted beyond what was required by the situation. He was never out of control, never exhibited any impatience of spirit, never any imbalance, but his life was all beautifully in order. How gentle he was, how patient, how compassionate, how thoughtful and careful of others, how strong and courageous he could be, how set upon the accomplishment of the will of the Father he was! Everything in his life reflected beauty; there was no disarray.
- The high priest was never to tear his garments, for as you remember, garments are a picture of the character of an individual. "What you

wear is what you are,” to paraphrase Flip Wilson. “What you see is what you get.” In other words, the character of the high priest is never to be inconsistent or defective, but always in place, always balanced and whole. As you read through the Gospels you can see how fully Jesus fulfilled these words.

- The prohibition against defilement with the dead extended even to father or mother in the case of the high priest. In other words, he was not to defile himself even with those closest to him. This may touch upon our Lord’s frequently strange-sounding words to his mother, Mary. There were those occasions when she came to him and drew upon their natural human relationship, and you remember how he spoke in a way which disassociated himself from that. When she asked him to change the water into wine his answer was, “Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come,” {cf, John 2:4}. He did the miracle she asked, but he made it very clear that it wasn’t because she was his mother that he did it; it was for another reason. And remember how he answered his human parents at the age of twelve: “Do you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” {cf, Luke 2:49}. He did not permit any kind of natural relationship to intervene with his work or in any way hinder what he came to be and to do. There was no involvement with the flesh at all, either in himself or with others. His spotless, unblemished character is set forth here in Leviticus.
- Finally, there was to be no blemish in his marriage. This is beautifully suggestive! The high priest was to marry only a virgin daughter of his people, and she was to be without any blemish at all. Does that not recall the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:

**“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” {Eph 5:25-27 RSV}**

“Well,” you say, “how can this be? We are part of the church, and we have all these blemishes

and spots and wrinkles and everything. Just look at us!” Well, this is why the Lord has set aside, totally, everything which comes from the flesh. That is why in his relationship with us he will never accept or tolerate or put up with any evidences of the flesh, nor allow it to be honored or exalted or blessed in his presence. That is why he will not acknowledge any ministry which is based upon self-sufficiency, the feeling that “I’ve got what it takes,” or, “God ought to feel lucky that I’m on his side because I’ve got something that he needs.” He has set all that aside. He has already written off all the blemishes and wrinkles and spots. They are there in our experience, but he has dealt with them, taken care of them already, and so no action which arises from the flesh will ever have any standing in God’s sight. As Paul says in First Corinthians, “No flesh shall glory in his presence,” {cf, 1 Cor 1:29 KJV}.

So if we operate in the flesh, in a spirit of ambition and desire to exalt ourselves, to be prominent in the eyes of others, it will never accomplish anything in God’s program. That is why God will never rest until we learn to draw from the strength of his life in us in order to serve him. Unless we do, he will never allow our ministry to have any spiritual effect at all. It may be impressive in the eyes of people, and you can make “a fair show in the flesh,” as Paul calls it {Gal 6:12 KJV}, so that even other Christians are fooled. But you will never deceive God one moment and there will be no power and no effect in your ministry. There can be no offering of the offerings nor of the bread of God if these blemishes are present. That is why he has already set them aside – so that his fellowship with his church is one in which all these things have been dealt with, already anticipated and handled. It is only we who get involved in and disturbed about these areas. But the Lord has cleansed the church and washed it with the Word, and now he is eliminating these defects from our lives in order that we might be without spot or blemish before him.

In Verses 16 on to the end of the chapter you have the **hereditary blemishes** which disqualify a person for the priesthood. These are things which come to us through our family connections, which in that sense are unavoidable, but which nevertheless disqualify us until they are dealt with:

**And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, None of your descendants throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. [That is, there is no way by which you can encourage others in the strength and fellowship of Jesus Christ if one of these blemishes is there.] For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles; no man of the descendants of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the LORD’s offerings by fire; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. He may eat of the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things, but he shall not come near the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries; for I am the LORD who sanctify them.” So Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the people of Israel. {Lev 21:16-24 RSV}**

This is almost self-explanatory, isn’t it? Here were people who were members of the priestly family and as such they were to eat the bread of God. There is no limitation against that. They could feed upon it themselves. They could grow by its strength.

Interpreted to our level, we can take the life of Christ and draw upon it for our own spiritual nourishment no matter what our personal lives are like. We are not cast out of the family of God even though there are defects. But we can’t pass it to others if we have a blemish like one of these. We cannot minister until they are handled, taken care of.

In the case of the Israelites, they were set aside all their life long because of these blemishes. They may not even have been their own fault, but God said, “No one with a blemish can minister in my presence,” because that would have taught a false lesson about the God who is behind the priesthood. But the glorious thing is that in the application to our lives these blemishes can be healed, they can be cleansed! We don’t have to be forever set aside from ministering.

Here again we are dealing with a reason why the Christian life is often boring to many. You may know that you are a priest, that you have the opportunity of ministering to others and helping them, but perhaps you can’t do it. Why? Well, it may be because there are blemishes in your life. Each of these blemishes has an antitype in the Christian economy:

- Were some of these Israelite priests blind? Well, some of us are, too. We just don’t see things very clearly. Our spiritual eyes are blinded.
- Were some of them lame? Some of us are, too. We don’t walk very well. We limp and stagger and stumble and fumble and fall on our faces at times.
- Did they have deformed hands or feet? Well, such can be the case with us. Something in our work or walk may be faulty at times, perhaps because it has been in our family for several generations and we are afflicted with the same hereditary tendency.
- Are there spiritual hunchbacks in the church – men and women with warped or twisted spiritual mentality, spiritual views, or spiritual structure in their lives? Yes, there are those among us, and they have little ministry. There is not much that they can do, other than to feed upon the life of God themselves.
- Are there dwarfs? There are *so* many dwarfs in the Christian churches today! – people who by this time ought to have grown to full spiritual stature, tall and strong, but instead they are pygmies, dwarfs, stunted in their growth.
- Are there those with a wrongful sex life, pictured here by crushed testicles? They have no ministry. They may try, but there is no power, no effectiveness. They don’t deliver people, cannot heal them.

All these blemishes prevent ministry. They don’t stop us from feeding upon the life of Christ, but they prevent us from ministering effectively to others, and, though we may perform the outward form of ministry, God withholds the power. The New Testament teaches this too. Paul says that if we purge ourselves from that which is wrong we shall

be a vessel unto honor, fit for the master's use {cf, 2 Tim 2:21 KJV}. He says that God is the one who determines energizings of ministry and that we are to work on that basis. And God knows our hearts {cf, 1 Th 2:4}. He knows what limits us.

Again and again, especially in dealing with young people, I have found so many Christians involved in wrongful habits and faulty outlooks, with obscured spiritual vision and impaired hearing of the Word. In working with them, I find that at first they usually have a sense that everything is fine – but they can't understand why their ministry and life is not as full and as satisfying as it ought to be. But finally we begin to get down to the nitty-gritty and they acknowledge that there are areas in their life which are wrong. Sometimes there is a great deal of resistance, but over and over I have seen young people and older people alike take this seriously and clear up these areas. And invariably they have an experience of sweetness and freshness and wider effectiveness in their spiritual lives – increased power, increased vision, and the ability to do much more than they were ever able to do before. And they say, "I didn't understand. I didn't realize that this habit that I was practicing was limiting me because it seemingly didn't interfere with my own enjoyment of the Lord." But it was interfering with their ministry, their priesthood. And very often they give heartwarming testimonies of what God has taught them through this experience of deliverance.

That is what **Chapter 22** goes on to tell us about. We will not take the time to read it now because it goes on in much the same vein and repeats much of what we have seen earlier in the book. I will merely summarize it.

- In Verses 1-9 we are taught the truth again that if there is uncleanness, it must be cleansed.
- Then in Verses 10-16 a restriction is placed upon strangers, foreigners. No one other than the children of Aaron, and especially no non-Israelite, could hold the priesthood. This, of course, is a picture for us that God is not interested in having those who are outside the family of God doing spiritual work for him. A non-Christian cannot do the work of God. No one who is not born again into the family of God can ever accomplish anything for God. It may appear that he is, in many ways, but, in

the sight of God and at the judgment seat of Christ {Rom 14:14:10, 2 Cor 5:10}, it will be revealed as nothing but wood, hay, and stubble instead of gold, silver, and precious jewels {1 Cor 3:12}. You may offer your talents to Christ but he doesn't use them for spiritual advance. He uses only spiritual gifts – which can be given only to Christians. Your talents may be channels for those gifts, but it is only the gifts that advance anyone spiritually.

- And, finally, there is to be no blemish in the offerings that are given. They are to be perfect because they are a picture of the work of Jesus Christ. Our understanding and presentation of the death and of the effectiveness of the life of Jesus must be clear and uncomplicated, without distortion. We are to understand these facts very plainly and apply them correctly.
- The chapter concludes with these wonderful words, Verses 31-33:

**“So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the LORD. And you shall not profane my holy name, but I will be hallowed among the people of Israel; I am the LORD who sanctify you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD.” {Lev 22:31-33 RSV}**

What tenderness and compassion there is in those verses! “I am the LORD,” he says, “who brought you out of bondage, out of slavery. I set you free. And I want to heal your life and bring you into a land of abundance and promise, of excitement and blessing and fruitfulness, with a sense of worth and power, and to be your God, to be available to you to teach you how to live as men were ordained to live in the beginning – in dominion over all the earth, over all the powers of darkness and evil that exist in the universe, and to walk as free people, healed and whole. That is why I speak to you this way,” the LORD says. “That is why at times I will not allow you to exercise ministry even though you want to, until you deal with the blemishes of your life. When they are healed, then your ministry can begin.”

When we submit to this, we discover that our priesthood begins to be rich and fulfilling and excit-

ing. God begins to enlarge our borders. A sense of worthwhileness comes into our life – beyond anything that we ever dreamed. We discover that God is not so much interested in our activity as he is in our attitudes – our being rather than our doing – and that we can please God while we are washing the dishes, by the right attitude of heart, that we can please God and be used of God when we are spading in the yard or working in the shop. His life begins to flow through us so that we are effective in applying the death of Christ to the disease and heartbreak of humanity around us and are effective in encouraging and building up and feeding and enriching by the bread of God the lives of those with whom we come in contact. There is an entire world around us waiting to be ministered to, hundreds and thousands of people with whom we are in touch each day and who need to be helped, need deliverance.

- Yours can be the word of that deliverance.
- Yours can be the word of power.
- You can encourage them
  - and build them up
  - and strengthen them,

if you deal first with the blemishes of your own life.

May God help us to do this as we come now to this Lord's table, which speaks so eloquently of these very things. As we administer the bread and the blood we must do so as whole people, healed before God. If some of you must leave, you are free to do so. This table, of course is for the family of God, for those who belong to him. No strangers are to partake of it unless they have, in this very

moment, become a part of that family by faith in Jesus Christ. The whole family is now invited to remind ourselves in symbol of what we have been learning from God's word.

**Prayer:**

Our heavenly Father, how grateful we are for the truth that you have set before us, a truth which you endeavor to teach us in so many ways – not only by this Word which comes with such clarity to our hearts as taught by the Spirit, but also by this symbol which Jesus himself instituted as he met with his own on the last day before his crucifixion. Lord Jesus, teach us now to draw strength from our God, to be holy, and to set aside our blemishes. How many of us have found renewed ministry when we have dealt with these areas which were wrong in our lives! We didn't know why our ministry was so shallow and so weak until we dealt with them, Lord. But when we handled these areas it opened up a whole new realm of ministry, a whole new level of maturity and effectiveness. So we thank you, Lord, because deep in our hearts we don't want to be phony. We want to be real and to be genuine. We want to be whole people able to help others to wholeness. Thank you for that possibility, Father, and thank you for the privilege of our priesthood and our ministry, in Christ's name, Amen.

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## God's Calendar

by Ray C. Stedman

The chapter of Leviticus to which we come this morning is to me one of the most remarkable in the Scriptures because in it is a list of the appointed feasts of Israel. These feasts were observed by the nation each year, year after year. There were seven of them, plus the weekly Sabbath. They were precisely spaced and dated because they represent God's calendar, the program on which he operates, the timetable of events by which he is moving through history.

I don't know how you use a calendar but these last few weeks I have been working on one which covers a year in advance. I've been setting up engagements – a conference here, a vacation there, a trip here, and various other events. I use it to plan with, to program, to try to lay out my desire and my intent. I can't always fulfill it, but it outlines what I hope to do. And God has a calendar, a program of events, and he is precisely moving along its time-line. It is so encouraging to read a passage like this in the Scriptures and to understand that God's program is right on schedule. It hasn't deviated one hour. Things are not out of control – as they may seem if you read only the newspapers and the magazines.

The feasts of Israel were not mere holidays to be observed on the nearest Monday in order to provide a long weekend. Each was a symbolic occasion or season designed to teach a truth which God wants to impart to his people, to drive home a basic truth which is fundamental to human happiness. That is why they were spaced and timed and regulated, their observance specially appointed and carefully predicted. As we go through them you will be able to see where we are in history right now, where the nation of Israel is in God's program for it, what has been fulfilled in the past, and what

lies yet unfulfilled in the future. And, as we have seen all through this book, things which were literally and historically true of the nation of Israel are also pictures of God's spiritual program with each one of us today. Every believer in Jesus Christ proceeds through this same order of spiritual development. That is what makes this a most fascinating chapter.

It begins with a reference to the institution of **the weekly Sabbath**, Verses 1-3:

**The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, The appointed feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed feasts, are these. Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings."**  
{Lev 23:1-3 RSV}

The weekly sabbath had begun, you remember, at Creation. God worked six days and then he rested on the seventh day. God did no work on the sabbath. This was reinstated and renewed in the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai when God reminded his people that the sabbath was at the heart of all his work.

I often hear Sunday referred to as "the sabbath." And perhaps you think that is just an old-fashioned word for Sunday. But that is completely wrong. Sunday is never the sabbath, and never was the sabbath! A transference is made of these ideas which is totally unbiblical. The seventh day was Saturday. The first day was Sunday. And Saturday was to be observed as the sabbath, as it still is in Israel today.

Now our friends, the Seventh Day Adventists, and most of them probably are brothers in Christ, feel that Christians still ought to observe the seventh day as God's day of appointed rest. They tell us that we should be worshipping on Saturday, not on Sunday. In their contention that God has never diminished the importance of the sabbath they are absolutely right. For the point of it was that it was a day of rest, and there was to be no labor done on that day. But, as we have already seen in this book, this was but a shadow, a symbol, and the symbol is never all-important. This observance of a day of rest is a picture of something else that God wants, which is of great significance to him, and when the reality came the shadow was done away with.

In the book of Colossians the Apostle Paul specifically tells us that the observance of a day is one of those shadows which, for the believer, ended at the coming of Christ {Col 2:16-17}. But then what is it that God is after? It does no good to do away with an observance if you don't find what it is pointing toward and begin to fulfill that. For the reality of the sabbath has always continued. It is given to us, among many other places in Scripture, in Hebrews Chapter 4, where the apostle reminds us that *sabbath* means "rest," and that this is a reference to the secret of life. Humans were made to operate out of rest, not out of tension, not out of anxiety, out of pressure, not in a rat race where we are always hounded and harassed and driven and hassled. These are exactly the opposite of what God intended when he made man. We were to operate in activity which proceeds out of rest.

What is that rest? Again Hebrews 4 tells us. In Verse 10 it says, "He who has entered into rest has ceased from his own labors, as God did from his," {cf, Heb 4:10 KJV}. That is, on the seventh day of creation, God ceased from all work. He who enters into rest has stopped his own work and is resting on the work of another. So if you learn the principle of operating out of dependence upon God at work in you, and if you don't try to do it all yourself – don't feel as if everything depends upon you, don't stew and fret and aren't anxious and troubled because you have got to get it done – but instead learn to rest on what God is ready to do in you and through you and around you, and expect him to do it, then you are observing the sabbath as God intended it to be observed.

Rest is at the heart of everything that God does. All these feasts are a form of the sabbath and consist of one sabbath or of several. All this is to indicate that this is the greatest secret of humanity. The indispensable but largely unlearned secret of our humanity is to learn how to operate out of rest. That is what the sabbath is all about. Notice, by the way, how Jesus stresses this idea in the Sermon on the Mount.

A man said to me last week, "You know, I'm always finding that I've got a 12-foot ditch to cross and a 10-foot plank. And no matter how I polish that plank it is never long enough! I'm always trying to stretch it to make it work." Well, the secret of the sabbath is for that very purpose. There is Someone who has a 12-foot plank and who is available to you all the time to cross the chasms which come into your life. That is why God highlights the sabbath at the beginning of this list of feasts.

The first feast was **the Passover**. It came in the spring of the year, at just about this time. In fact this year the Passover falls on March 30. This was the beginning of the year as far as God's program for his people was concerned. In Verses 4-5 we are told:

**"These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening, is the LORD's passover." {Lev 23:4-5 RSV}**

The details of this feast are given in other parts of Scripture. It was a reminder of that dramatic moment in Egypt when, because of Pharaoh's intransigence, the angel of death was commanded to pass throughout the land of Egypt and kill the first-born son in every household. But God had made provision for his own people. If they would kill a lamb and put its blood over the doorposts the angel would see the blood and would pass over that house. So it was called the *passover*. It was God's graphic way of teaching humanity, through Israel, that the basis of his work with human beings always must rest upon the death of another on our behalf. The basis of salvation is rest in the labor of someone else to solve the problem of our inherent evil. That is what the New Testament calls *justifi-*



*cation*. It occurs when you trust that the work of Jesus Christ, our passover, is sufficient for you.

You remember how this was historically fulfilled. On the very evening of the Passover, Jesus ate the last Passover feast with his disciples. And, on the day when the rest of Israel was offering a lamb on the doorposts, the Lamb of God died upon a cross. He was crucified there in obedience to the command of the Roman governor and at the request of the Jewish officials who had cried out on behalf of the people, "Crucify him, crucify him!" {Luke 23:21, John 19:6 KJV}. And that is the fundamental teaching of the gospel – that we are safe from the wrath of God under the blood of Christ.

Linked with the passover was **the Feast of Unleavened Bread**. It followed immediately, Verses 6-8:

**"And on the fifteenth day of the same month [the next day] is the feast of unleavened bread to the LORD; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work [it is a sabbath]. But you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD seven days; on the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work." {Lev 23:6-8 RSV}**

Two Sabbaths were always involved, plus the weekly sabbath. It didn't make any difference which days of the week they fell on; it was the day of the month which counted. It began on the fifteenth day, lasted seven days, then ended. This feast again looked back to Egypt, to the command God gave then that the Israelites clear all leaven from their houses. To this day, orthodox Jews meticulously do this in preparation for the passover season. (In fact, this is the origin of the custom of Spring cleaning.)

Leaven is yeast. It is a very apt symbol of that which in human lives tends to puff us up. That is what yeast does in bread – it makes it swell. And there is something at work in us, God says, which makes us swell up, puff up.

A doctor once told me, "The strangest thing about the human anatomy is that when you pat it on the back, the head swells up."

Why is that? Well, there is a principle at work in us which drives us to be self-sufficient. You know how universal that tendency is. "Please,

mother, I'd rather do it myself!" We don't want any help. We don't even want to tell people our problems, to let them know that we are not sufficient in ourselves. We all have this tendency within us to want to protect our images and to look as if we've got it made and don't need help. And if someone makes us mad by offering aid we tell them so: "Get lost!" "Drop dead!" "I don't need you!" That is leaven. It can take all kinds of forms:

- Jesus often spoke of leaven. He said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" {cf, Luke 12:1}, i.e., pretending. We Christians do so much of that, don't we? Pretending we don't have any problems when we do. Pretending we're spiritual when we're not. Pretending we're joyful when we're unhappy and filled with misery inside. Pretending we tell the truth when we don't. That is hypocrisy, leaven which comes from this damnable aversion to admitting that we need some help.
- Jesus spoke of the leaven of the Sadducees, which was rationalism, the denial of the supernatural, the feeling that everything can be explained in terms of what you can see, taste, touch, smell, and feel, that there is no power beyond man and that man is sufficient to himself {Matt 16:5-12}.
- Our Lord spoke of the leaven of the Herodians {Mark 8:14-21}, who were materialists. They lived for pleasure, for comfort and luxury, and for status and prestige and the favor of people. They had their ear to the ground so as to be able to manipulate and maneuver politically and thus to advance themselves.
- Paul speaks of the leaven of sexual immorality in First Corinthians 5:

**"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened [It is not really your true nature as a Christian to act that way]. For Christ, our paschal lamb [our passover] has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." {1 Cor 5:6-8 RSV}**

That is what this feast is all about. And preceding it, that is the purpose of the Passover, God begins his work with the blood of the Lamb to protect us from his just wrath in order that we might learn to be freed from leaven.

The third feast soon followed, **the Feast of the First Fruits**, Verses 9-14:

**And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, When you come into the land which I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest; and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, that you may find acceptance; on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. And the cereal offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, to be offered by fire to the LORD, a pleasing odor; and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God. it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings." {Lev 23:9-14 RSV}**

In the land of Israel, which climatically is very much like this part of California, the barley was planted in the fall and came to harvest in the springtime. You can read about that in the book of Ruth. The harvest was preceded by the Feast of First Fruits in which they took a sheaf of grain, cut it, and waved it before the LORD, offering the harvest to the LORD. With it came certain sacrifices, speaking again of rest in the blood and the work of Another. They were specifically warned not to eat of this grain in any form whatsoever until they had made this offering.

What was this a picture of? We don't have to guess. In First Corinthians 15, Paul tells us that, on the third day, when our Lord rose from the dead, he was the first fruits of God's harvest {cf, 1 Cor 15:20-23}. In other words, when God begins his work with men he does it with the death of another on our behalf, announces that the purpose of it is that he might free us from all kinds of leaven in our

lives, and then declares that the outcome of it will be life out of death, a risen life. And our Lord was the first one to rise from the dead when he came out of the grave on that beautiful Easter morning.

You notice that the first fruits were to be offered on the morrow after the sabbath. The sabbath is Saturday. That makes the morrow after it Sunday. So this is the Lord's day – the day of resurrection. On the day of resurrection the Feast of First Fruits, the reminder of a new creation, a new life with new kinds of food, was given to us. And, historically, you recall, the Gospels say, "As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, the disciples came to the tomb and found it empty," {cf, Matt 28:1}. Christ was risen from the dead, a risen Lord, imparting to us a new kind of life, a new creation. That is the Feast of First Fruits and that is the day for believers to celebrate.

The next feast is found in Verses 15-21:

**"And you shall count from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven full weeks shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a cereal offering of new grain to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah; they shall be of fine flour, they shall be baked with leaven, as first fruits to the LORD." [Then there follow animal and cereal offerings similar to those we have already examined earlier in Leviticus] {Lev 23:15-17 RSV}**

This feast, because it came fifty days after the Feast of First Fruits, was called **Pentecost**. *Pentecost* means fiftieth.

Notice that this too fell on the day after a sabbath, Sunday, further evidence that God has shifted the day of celebration for believers to the first day of the week.

How was this fulfilled historically in the carrying out of God's work with his people? You remember what happened on Pentecost. On that day as the disciples were gathered in the upper room the Holy Spirit suddenly came upon them in a new way. A new body was formed, the body of the church, made up no longer simply of Jews alone

but, as Peter announced, of Jews and Gentiles – two loaves baked with leaven.

Leaven, as we have seen, is a picture of the working of evil in our lives. And when the Holy Spirit came, he came upon people just like you and me, people still struggling with leaven, this principle of self-sufficiency. And we can be filled with the Holy Spirit as they were filled on that day. He can live in us and work in us. So the church as it exists today is beautifully symbolized by these two loaves – Jews and Gentiles together – filled with the Spirit, and still possessing leaven within us. This was the beginning of the new work that God was going to do with his people.

The heart of this feast was these two loaves, baked with leaven. Baking is accomplished by heat, by fire. And in the Scriptures fire always symbolizes judgment. As the Holy Spirit took up residence in men and women still capable of sin, the leaven still there, this nevertheless was testimony that God would work in his people, would judge their leaven and bring it under control. They themselves would never in this life be an example of what Christianity is in its perfection – you can see that only in Christ. But nevertheless they would be the expression of God's fellowship with humanity.

Those two loaves have been at work all through the history of the world since then.

In fact, do you see how these feasts actually have anticipated history? And now the interesting thing is that this Feast of Pentecost occurred around the middle of May and that from mid-May until the first of the seventh month, which would be about mid-September, there were no more feasts in Israel. A long period of time would go by before another feast – a long hot summer. During that time only one provision was made and that is given to us in Verse 22:

**“And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God.” {Lev 23:22 RSV}**

The “stranger” is the non-Jew, the non-Israelite – in other words, the Gentile. That is, after the day of Pentecost there was to be for a long, indeterminate period of time an open door for the Gentiles to come in and feed in the richness of the fields of Is-

rael. This is what has been happening in human history up to this point.

The next feast is **the Feast of Trumpets** which, as we will see, is yet to be fulfilled, Verses 23-25:

**And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blasts of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work; and you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.” {Lev 23:23-25 RSV}**

The central manifestation of this feast was blasts of trumpets. What does that mean? Once again we are not left to guess.

If you turn to Matthew 24, Jesus is describing how this age will end. There will be the rise of the antichrist, the division of the nations into warring camps, and great tribulation will spread abroad on earth, a time of terrible trouble. In Verses 29-31 he says,

**“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth [the tribes of Israel] will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” {Matt 24:29-31 RSV}**

That is the next event in God's program with his people Israel. The Son of man will come, and the trumpet of God will herald the final gathering of Israel to the land. Much as we are interested in what is happening in Palestine now, the return of the Jews to their land, nevertheless this is not the final gathering. There is going to be another Dispersion, strangely enough. It will not last long, but Zechariah describes in detail how the city of Jerusalem shall again be taken captive and the people driven from it. It is only after they see returning the One whom they once rejected that they will be

called back by the angels of God in the Feast of Trumpets, never to leave again, and God will take up his work with Israel once again.

This is to be followed by the great **Day of Atonement**, described in Verses 26-32 of Leviticus 23:

**And the LORD said to Moses, "On the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present an offering by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whoever is not afflicted on this same day shall be cut off from his people." [And he goes on to declare it a solemn sabbath.] {Lev 23:26-29}**

Certain offerings were to be given in connection with this which are described in detail in Chapter 16. But the distinctive thing about this day is that it is to be a time of self judgment, of affliction of spirit, a time of looking at yourself and seeing the wasted years of your life, and of mourning, regretting those wasted opportunities. For Israel this is described in detail in Zechariah 12:

**"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrimmon on the plain of Megiddo." {Zech 12:10-11 RSV}**

That is when Israel shall regret their long centuries of unbelief. For the Christian this time of mourning, this review of the wasted eras of life, comes at the judgment seat of Christ, when we "receive the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad" {cf, 2 Cor 5:10}, and we learn how much of our life was spent in the flesh, following after the leaven, and how much of it was spent in the Spirit, rejoicing in the work of Another on our behalf, depending upon him to produce gold, silver, and precious stones in our life.

And then, finally, comes the last of the feasts, **the Feast of Tabernacles**, or booths, Verses 33-36:

**And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the feast of booths to the LORD. On the first day shall be a holy convocation, you shall do no laborious work. Seven days you shall present offerings by fire to the LORD; on the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a solemn assembly; you shall do no laborious work." {Lev 23:33-36}**

Then a little later on in the chapter, Verses 40-43:

**"And you shall take on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD seven days in the year; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations, you shall keep it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days, all that are native in Israel shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God." {Lev 23:40-43 RSV}**

That is a beautiful picture of what is frequently called *the millennium*, the time which follows Israel's restoration to their LORD and God, when they return to a relationship to nature with the curse removed and God beautifully blesses the earth and the desert shall blossom like the rose. The secret of peace will be found and nations shall not make war any more, and rejoicing will be the whole experience of men on the earth. The secret of all that, as Paul tells us in Romans 11, is the nation Israel. They are still in the long hot summer right now, before the Feast of Trumpets restores them.

But, as we have seen all along in this book of Leviticus, all of this is now being fulfilled in the spiritual program of each believer in Jesus Christ. God is at work in your life to bring you along this pathway, just as he outlines it here, so that you

shall discover and come at last to the place of joy. C. S. Lewis says, "The ultimate purpose of God in all his work is to increase joy." And this Feast of Tabernacles is a beautiful picture of the radiant joy which is always the final product of God at work in a human life.

God's process with each of us leads from wrath and judgment and fear to the place where we rest at last in the blood of the passover lamb, Jesus Christ, shed on our behalf. It goes on through gradual separation from evil, with much tears and fainting, and yet in the power of a new life imparted by the Holy Spirit. It progresses to the healing of broken relationships and the gathering of believers together into one body, the breaking down of middle walls of partition between us. It moves on through the restoration of the wasted years of our life unto, finally, the experience of radiant, unrestrained joy in what God himself is.

That is God's program.

Last week I met with a young pastor who for years had been teaching the Scriptures and seeking to serve God. There was much of blessing in his ministry, but every time he seemed to be just on the verge of breaking loose in really tremendous effectiveness something would happen and he'd go off on a tangent. The work would fall apart and he'd have to start over again, and the whole process would repeat itself. Finally we sat down together and he told me his story. "Something is wrong in my life," he said, "but I don't know what it is and I don't know how to find it."

We talked about this at considerable length, and finally it came out. Here was a man who had dedicated his life to God with great earnestness, and all through his ministry he had prided himself

on the faithfulness of his dedicated spirit. He told me, "I've always looked down on people who were not as dedicated as I was. And I've always felt there were certain things I would never do." Then he went on to tell me, with much heartbreak, how God had allowed him to fall on his face, terribly, in an area where he had thought he could never fall. But, at the end, he said, "I've learned something. I've learned that I don't have any standing before God except that of forgiveness. Anything at all that I have thought that I could be faithful to, and could depend upon myself for, is not acceptable in God's sight. At last God has made me realize that I have no ground to stand on except his forgiving grace."

Then with radiant joy in his face, just beaming through his tears, he looked at me and said, "What a relief! What a relief! God has at last reduced me to the place where now he can begin to use me!"

That is what God is at work to do. The worst form of evil is self-righteousness. If we think we have something that God needs, and that we can serve him by our dedicated spirit, he will find some way to pull the rug out from under us and to bring us at last to the place where we stand before him without any merit of our own. And with joy filling our hearts we know that this is the way God intended men to live – to rest in the work of Another.

Well, that is Israel's ecclesiastical year, as it has been called, "God's program for his people" – whether his earthly people or those with the heavenly calling. This is the way God works.

Where are you in God's calendar?

We can see where we are in history, but where are you?

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## The Pattern of Man

by Ray C. Stedman

This book of Leviticus, the close of which we are now rapidly approaching, is a revelation of basic humanity – our basic human needs and the basic proper behavior of man operating as God intended him to operate. It reveals what is possible to us through the Spirit of God.

When I was in Dallas a few days ago I spoke on Leviticus 23 at a home meeting. There were a number of teenagers and other young people among the many people there. At the close of the meeting a college girl came up to me and said,

“You know, I’ve been receiving your printed messages on Leviticus by mail, and I’ve been so interested in reading them because I’ve never understood what that book had to say. What is so fascinating to me is that I’m enrolled in a psychology course and we have recently finished studying what the basic, fundamental needs of a human being are. They are exactly in line with what you brought out in the first chapters of Leviticus. The difference is that Leviticus gave me the answer as to how to meet them, but I never got that in my class.”

That is what this book, in fact the whole Bible, is about – how to understand man – what he is, and how he lives, how he thinks, and what God has done to meet his needs. And the key to the understanding of man is a building called “the tabernacle” because this building was built to represent man. All the functions which went on here are revelations of what is intended to go on within man, within our human spirit and soul and body. This building was reproduced later in the temple. That is why there is such tremendous emphasis upon the tabernacle and the temple throughout the Bible. It is to teach man truth about himself, because the key to the understanding of the tabernacle is that it was built according to the pattern of man.

The pattern for the tabernacle was part of the great revelation God gave Moses upon the mountain top when he was with him for forty days and forty nights as all Israel waited at the foot of the mountain. Therefore it is an extremely important revelation, on a par with the Ten Commandments. God meticulously and carefully laid out for Moses the exact plan for constructing this building and for carrying on the functions within it. Moses was very obedient and fulfilled precisely what God had said.

What was the pattern that God showed Moses? Well, we never really learn until we come to the New Testament book of Hebrews where we are told that the tabernacle was designed to be the house of God, and that *we* are that house. That is, man is the intended dwelling place of God, and the building was built to show us what man is like.

The tabernacle had three divisions, just as man has three divisions:

- First there was the outer court which corresponds to the body of man, to which even the Gentiles could come. It is the body which puts us in touch with the material universe in which we live.
- Then the structure of the tabernacle itself had two divisions: There was the holy place, and, hidden behind a veil in a secret area, the holy of holies. This corresponds exactly to the divisions within us:
  - There is the soul, the conscious life, the realm of ideas, of knowledge, of rationality, of emotion, of choices, of conscience, and of memory – all these functions take place in the soul.
  - But there is also that mysterious realm hidden deep within each of us, a realm of mystery to most of us, where all the deep

urges and fundamental drives and hungers of our life arise. This is the spirit, designed as God's dwelling place, just as in the tabernacle the Shekinah glory, the light which represented God, dwelt in the holy of holies.

In the opening part of Chapter 24 we have a marvelous description of the functions which went on in *the holy place* of the tabernacle. This is merely a summary of truth taught elsewhere in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, but it is very revealing. It deals with the furniture that was in this place which corresponds to the soul, or the conscious life, of a human being.

There were three pieces of furniture:

- The golden candelabra with its seven branches, of which we all have seen pictures and which is still such a fundamental symbol among the Jewish people;
- The solid gold table, upon which was to be displayed the twelve loaves of show bread that was the food of the priests; and
- The golden altar of incense, which stood right against the veil which separated the holy place from the holy of holies and where the fragrant frankincense was burned before God as an offering by fire.

Those pieces of furniture are a remarkably accurate picture of how the three major functions of our soul – the mind, the emotions, and the will – are intended to operate as the soul is filled with the Spirit of God.

The specific commands regarding **the candelabra** are first, Verses 1-4:

**The LORD said to Moses, “Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning continually. Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the Lord continually; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. He shall keep the lamps in order upon the lampstand of pure gold before the LORD continually.”**  
{Lev 24:1-4 RSV}

Notice the elements of this passage:

Pure olive oil brought by the people was to be the fuel which produced the light of the candelabra. It was to burn continuously and was never to go out. Especially was it to be burning at night. From evening to morning Aaron was especially responsible to keep the light going because then, of course, this was the sole illumination of the tabernacle. And the light was to be placed on the golden candlestick.

What does all this mean?

If you are familiar with these beautiful symbols of the Old Testament you can easily interpret the passage.

- There is a function within our conscious life which is designed to give us light. What is that? Well, we speak of light as truth. You might say, “Could you give me some light on this problem?” and then, “Oh, now I see the light.” You mean, “Now I understand it, now I grasp it. I see reality, I understand the truth.” So light is continually a symbol of truth. And which of our human functions is designed to lay hold of truth? It is the mind, isn't it? God has given us a mental faculty, a rational ability to think, to explore, to search out, to investigate, to study and correlate and relate one aspect of life to another. The whole functioning of the mind is designed to produce truth.
- But notice that the light is produced by the oil, and oil is forever, in Scripture, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. So here is truth produced and made known by the Holy Spirit; in other words, truth revealed by God. That is to be the governing faculty in man. That is where we are to get our basic understanding of who we are, and where we are, of what life is all about, and what the world is here for, and how the universe functions. All this is to come from the mind illuminated by the Spirit.
- The light is to be held up by the golden candlestick, and gold is always the symbol of Deity. So it is the divine life within us which sustains this light, shining in the darkness of the world's night.

All this is a marvelous picture of how believers are to function in the world. We are to start with the mind taught by God to see life as God sees it. Most of the problems which come into our lives

originate because we don't do this. The danger of having services on Sunday is that we all tend to come and sit and listen to truth from the Word of God which explains what life is like, how people are to live, what we are to do, and how we are to react to the situations which confront us, and we all pay attention and are helped and stirred and nod our heads in agreement, but on Monday morning we go back to our business, our shop, our kitchen, our homes and family relationships – the ordinary circumstances of life – and we forget all about it! We revert to natural thinking and start acting again like everybody else around us. We believe all the illusions which those who are not taught of God believe, and we start acting and reacting the same way they do, and then we wonder why we have problems! But the whole purpose of these meetings is that we might be governed not by natural thinking but by a mind illuminated by the truth which God reveals about life – which is the way it really is.

This is the problem highlighted by that little story in the Gospels about the time when Jesus came into the home of Mary and Martha. They had been to the synagogue together and evidently Jesus had taught there. They must have had an exciting morning when Jesus began to open the Scriptures; I have often wished that I could have been there when Jesus began to teach. But when Mary and Martha came home with him for dinner, Martha went into the kitchen and forgot all about what she had learned. She began to stew and fret about how to get dinner ready. She bustled around, and couldn't find things, and spilled the coffee, and scorched the potatoes, and burned her fingers. She got all upset, and distracted, and then finally came bursting into the living room and blamed the whole mess on Jesus: "Lord, why didn't you tell my sister to come out and help me? It's all your fault!" {cf, Luke 10:40}. Remember how Jesus replied. "Martha, Martha, you are full of care. You've gotten everything out of perspective. Life is out of focus for you, and you've let these insignificant little trivialities mount up to a tremendous problem. But only one thing is necessary," {cf, Luke 10:41-42}. What is that? What is the one fundamental thing which is necessary? Why, it is to see things the way they are! It is to face reality and to deal with things realistically. If that is not the basis of your operations in your business world or in your family life or anywhere else, then you are wrong to

start with. Of course everything is going to go awry! "Mary has chosen that good portion. She has taken the time to sit and listen and get her perspectives straight, to put things back into focus, and I'm not going to take it away from her," Jesus said {cf, Luke 10:42}.

I don't know of anything more desperately necessary for Christians today than that we personally and individually expose our minds and thoughts to the revelation of God's truth and consistently practice looking at life as he tells us it is, not as the world or our feelings say it is – and that we take his teaching seriously. To fail to do so is what gets us all confounded and confused.

I had lunch earlier this week with a dear man who is pastor of a church. He was raised with a totally liberal orientation. He never knew anything about the evangelical view of life or of the Bible, and he was pastor of a liberal church. He understood nothing of the gospel nor of the truth revealed in Scripture, but was primarily concerned about social issues and all the other things emphasized in liberal philosophy. But through a chain of circumstances he discovered the bankruptcy of that view. Out of a desperate need in his own life he was driven at last to God and he became a Christian. He cast himself upon the redeeming, saving grace of Jesus Christ and was born again. Now he is in the process, very wisely and gently, and yet very definitely, of turning that whole church into an evangelical, Bible-centered, Bible-teaching church. He told me how he had felt when, as a liberal without any particular conviction of the truth of the Bible, he nevertheless was driven to God by the desperate need of his own heart. He said,

"I was prepared to do anything, if only God would meet me! I was prepared to give up anything, pay any price, and I thought I would have to. I thought, for one thing, that to be an evangelical Christian I would have to put my reason into cold storage, and I was ready to do it! But one of the delightful discoveries of my life has been that after I really found Jesus and knew him as my Lord and my Redeemer, my Savior, my mind has been challenged by the Scriptures more than it has ever been challenged before. I am discovering that becoming an evangelical doesn't mean that you have to hang your intellect up in the closet. Rather, it challenges you to search out the truth about life in a deeper way than ever before!"



Some years ago we had with us a then young instructor in nuclear physics at Stanford University, Dr. John McIntyre, who is now a professor and director of the atomic particle accelerator at Texas A & M. He said that the thing which impressed him about the Bible when he became a Christian was that it was built just like nature. He investigated the world of nature all the time, and he said that nature, on the surface, looks rather simple. But the more deeply you probe it the more complex and difficult it becomes, until it staggers the intellect. And he said,

“I have found the same thing about the Bible. On the surface it looks simple even a child can believe it. But as you begin to investigate it and search out its relationships and go deeper and deeper into it, the fuses of your mind begin to blow, until you stand absolutely amazed and astonished before God.”

That is the import of that passage in the book of Job where Job stands at last before God, and God begins to ask him some questions. Job hangs his head and says, “I can’t answer a one. I’ve flunked the course completely.” He was humbled before the greatness and the wisdom of the mind of God, revealed in his truth.

The next piece of furniture brought before us is **the table of show bread**, Verses 5-9:

**“And you shall take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes of it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. And you shall set them in two rows, six in a row, upon the table of pure gold. And you shall put pure frankincense with each row, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion to be offered by fire to the LORD. Every sabbath day Aaron shall set it in order before the LORD continually on behalf of the people of Israel as a covenant for ever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the offerings by fire to the LORD, a perpetual due.” {Lev 24:5-9 RSV}**

On the table of show bread was spread every sabbath day a freshly baked series of twelve loaves of bread made of fine flour, and, as we are told elsewhere, without any leaven. These were to be displayed there for a week with frankincense spread

on top of them. At the end of the week the frankincense was offered on the golden altar of incense and the bread was consumed by the priests as part of their diet.

What is the meaning of all this?

The twelve loaves are a picture of the twelve tribes of Israel – in other words, of all the people of God. Fine flour, as we have seen before, is a picture of redeemed humanity, because it is fine flour, without any lumps or coarseness. (Our natural humanity would have to be pictured by something like coarse oatmeal with a lot of chaff mixed in). And this fine flour is without leaven, without sin, as is the new nature within us, the Spirit of God imparted to us, the life of Christ by which we live. And the unleavened fine flour is all mixed up together, is in communion, representing a sharing together. So this is a beautiful picture of the realm of relationships with other believers which involves the whole range of emotions – joy, sorrow, tears, love, peace, grief, elation – all shared together. To put it in one phrase, this is body-life – bearing one another’s burdens, confessing our faults one to another, admonishing, rebuking, exhorting, restoring one another, ministering to each other with our spiritual gifts, being sensitive to one another’s needs, responding to the heartbreak or the rejoicing of others. All of this commonality of life is depicted in the show bread, revealing here the need of the people of God to have fellowship with one another with God in their midst, not out of the flesh but in the Spirit.

The frankincense was burned on **the altar of incense** which was the third piece of furniture in the holy place. God always insisted that it be frankincense and no other kind.

Remember that the two older sons of Aaron got into trouble which cost them their lives because they burned another kind of incense before God. Why? Because frankincense yields its fragrance only when it is burned.

This is a picture of fragrance coming out of suffering. It is this which is offered unto God as a fragrance before him. This represents the third activity of the human consciousness in which we all engage – the exercise of the will, the making of choices. So here is a picture of the obedient heart, the heart which responds to the truth perceived by the mind, illuminated by the Spirit, which shares in the emotions of a common life within the body of

Christ, and thus decides to walk before God in obedience. That is a fragrance in the nostrils of God. Jesus' life was a continual sweet smell before God because of his obedient spirit. He did what the Father said to do. And the will is the human faculty by which that ultimate choice is made.

So when these factors – the knowledge and understanding of the mind, and the feeling of the heart – gather together to be expressed in an action which is in line with what God has said, that is a fragrant life lifted up before God. That is a life which honors and glorifies God. It doesn't make any difference what the action is. It might be lying flat on the back in a sickbed, or it may be intense activity. It isn't the activity which is glorifying God; it is the character of the life which is behind it. That is what God depicts so beautifully here for us.

Do you remember that crucial moment of David's life when he had fallen into terrible evil and had broken up a man's marriage and then murdered the man in order to cover it up? When all this came home to his heart and he saw what he had done he cried out before God in the beautiful words of the fifty-first Psalm. He speaks of the forgiveness and the cleansing extended by God, and then he says,

**For thou desirest not sacrifice; else I would give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. {Psa 51:16-17 KJV}**

That is what honors God – a broken spirit and a contrite heart. That is a sweet-smelling fragrance in God's sight.

Now, to return to the bread momentarily, it was to become the food of the priests. Priesthood, as you know, is always a picture of ministry and service by believers. So the interesting thing this suggests is that as we fellowship together and share our lives with one another, are open and transparent with each other and bear one another's burdens, we are thus strengthened and motivated to minister to others. I don't think anything has been more demonstrative of this than the new sense of sharing which has come into our own midst here in the last few years and which is expressed in our Body Life services. As we have learned to begin really to love

each other, really to listen to one another's problems and to want to do something about them, to act on them and really try to help one another, there has come a far greater expression of life and love to the whole community around us. People have started taking others into their homes and reaching out to the drug addicts and the drunks and the lonely and the depressed and others in need. You see, out of the sharing of the bread, the eating of the bread of common life, comes the strength for ministry.

The closing part of the chapter is **a picture of that which threatens this kind of life**. An interesting story begins in Verse 10:

**“Now an Israelite woman's son, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the people of Israel, and the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel quarreled in the camp, and the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name, [the name of God] and cursed. And they brought him to Moses. His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan. And they put him in custody, till the will of the LORD should be declared to them.” {Lev 24:10-12 RSV}**

Why is this put in such sharp juxtaposition to this account of the operation of the inner life of man? It is because this portrays something which threatens and imperils the relationship which has just been described to us. It is vividly demonstrated in this story of a young man whom we would term a “half-breed,” half Egyptian and half-Israelite. There must have been hundreds of young men and women in the camp of Israel who had that background. This doesn't mean there is anything inherently wrong with that. But this person is picked out and highlighted for us because his life typifies a spiritual conflict. In the Scriptures, Israel is a picture of the Spirit at work within us, of the new life, the redeemed life, while Egypt is always a picture of the world, of the old life. And here is someone who, in type, is trying to mix the two – trying to live halfway between. He pictures someone who is still trying to conduct his business affairs, perhaps, by the laws of Egypt, by the ways of the world, and is also trying to mix in the world view and outlook of God. And this always gets you into trouble.

This young man had gotten into a quarrel with somebody in the camp and, in the heat of anger and passion he blurted out what was deep down within his thoughts but which he had hidden before. There is a Latin phrase: *In vino veritas*, i.e., “In wine there is truth.” It is also true that in anger there is truth. When they are angry people will say something that they would never say otherwise. Usually it is something they would like to have said, but didn’t dare.

That is what happened here. This young man had been thinking what he said for quite a long time. Finally someone stirred him up – we don’t know what the quarrel was about – and he got mad. And he didn’t merely get angry at the man he was quarreling with; he cursed the Name. He didn’t say, “God damn you,” as we hear so often today; he said, “God be *damned!*” That represented the outlook of his heart, the settled conviction of his heart that it was all God’s fault and that he didn’t want anything to do with God.

So they brought him to Moses, and Moses said, “I don’t know how to handle this. Take him to God. Let’s let God decide what to do.” So we read,

**And the LORD said to Moses, “Bring out of the camp him who cursed; and let all who heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. And say to the people of Israel, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. He who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him; the sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.” {Lev 24:13-16 RSV}**

There is the judgment of God in this case. He says this not because he has been offended by this man, not because he is vindictive and retaliates. God is not that kind of person. He is a patient, loving God who could in longsuffering have borne this affront for centuries, as he has our cursing and bitterness. But he prescribes immediate death because this sentence is designed to teach a truth. The truth is that a man who curses God, who rejects God, has denied himself the very basis of life. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,” {cf, Matt 4:4}. And if a professed believer denies God, he has denied the basis of his life, the

only way he can live. So God makes it obvious, makes it clear. He says that the man has lost the right to live, has denied himself that right. And his life was taken away so that the truth might be vividly demonstrated to all.

Thus we know that this is what happens to us, spiritually. We don’t need to point the finger at this young man, do we? How often do we do this very thing! We get angry with God and we shake our fists at him, just as Martha did with Jesus. She blamed the whole thing on him, and we do it, too. We say, “It’s your fault! Get lost, God, I don’t need you anymore.” And when we take that attitude, God says, our life is ended. Our spiritual life is stopped right there. We are not lost. This doesn’t mean that we have lost our salvation; it means that his supply of life to us to live by day by day is ended – until we see what is wrong – and his grace restores us. Then we can begin again.

There are other things listed here in the closing part of the chapter for which the penalty is the same, Verses 17-22:

**“He who kills a man shall be put to death. [If you injure a neighbor or ruin his reputation you will find that the same thing happens to you. Spiritually you cannot live at that level.] He who kills a beast shall make it good, life for life. When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbor, as it has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has disfigured a man, it shall be disfigured. He who kills a beast shall make it good; and he who kills a man shall be put to death. You shall have one law for the sojourner and for the native; for I am the LORD your God.” {Lev 24:17-22 RSV}**

What does this mean? Well, it is simply the putting into practice, in a vivid and visible way, of what Jesus said later in the Gospels: “Judge not that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete to others it shall be measured back to you again,” {cf, Matt 7:1}. The way you treat another person is the way you are going to be treated. If you don’t like the way you are being treated, take a look at what you are doing to someone else. They are only giving you back what you are giving to them. It is strange – we all want to live by a double standard, don’t we? We all want

to have people treat us right, but we reserve the right to treat them differently. We want to be able to be sharp and sarcastic to others, but we don't think that they have the right to be sharp and sarcastic to us. We want to take advantage of somebody else by being lazy and letting them do the work and not taking our fair share of the load, but we don't want them to do that to us.

But God says that we can't live that way. The way you treat another is the way it is going to come back to you, so don't complain. That is a basic law of life. The only way it can be conquered is by a change in you. When you change, then others will be changed by that. This is one of the wonderful discoveries we can make. For years we may struggle with a problem in our relationships to others, and we think, "If I could just get these people to change!" Then suddenly we discover that it was we who were causing the problem, and we change. And to our amazement the other people all change too!

**"So Moses spoke to the people of Israel; and they brought him who had cursed out of the camp, and stoned him with stones. Thus the people of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses." {Lev 24:23 RSV}**

How accurate these Scriptures are! How they search us out and find us. And yet how marvelous are the possibilities when our mind is under the

control of the Spirit and we look at every problem in life not according to the way we were taught in school nor the way our family has done it for centuries but the way the Word of God says it is, and when we relate to one another with openness and genuineness and thus our ministry is strengthened, and when we offer to God the fragrance of an obedient heart. That is life as God intended it to be lived!

### **Prayer:**

Teach us, our Father, how to live this way by the power of your Spirit within us. Help us to understand that it isn't our dedicated, consecrated effort which is going to do it. It is our understanding that we can't do a thing without you, that you must enable us if we are going to be what you want us to be. Little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept, please make that come clear to us, Lord, because we are tired of living defeated lives, lives filled with conflict and pressures unresolved, and anxieties and hostilities and resentments and bitterness. We want to be your men and women, as you designed us to be. Thank you for the possibilities in Jesus Christ. In his name we pray, Amen.

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## The True Basis of Social Concern

by Ray C. Stedman

The twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus is very appropriate to Palm Sunday. As the first verse tells us, it was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. God gave most of the book of Leviticus to Moses as he stood in the entry door of the tabernacle. There the LORD unfolded the sacrifices and the ceremonies, the rituals and the cleansings – all of which speak of the work of Christ on our behalf. They have to do with redemption, with handling the problem of evil in the individual heart. But when God speaks about government he speaks from Sinai. The Ten Commandments were given from Sinai and this revelation of Chapter 25 was given at the same time. Therefore, God is speaking as the King of the nations. And it was in that character that our Lord entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday – the “triumphal entry.” He and his party took their way down the orchard-clad slopes of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley, and up into the city. He was riding on a donkey, and he came fulfilling the prediction of Zechariah the prophet:

**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on an ass,  
on a colt the foal of an ass. {Zech 9:9  
RSV}**

He had previously fulfilled the prophecy that a prophet greater than Moses was to come. All of his ministry up until then had been prophetic, piercing unto the heart of this nation, showing them what was needed, and turning them back to God. And in a few days he was to stand as the great high priest and offer himself as the Passover Lamb for the sins of the nation and of the world. So in our Lord's ministry he fulfilled those three great, significant offices of Israel: prophet, priest, and king.

It is as King that God speaks to Israel here in Chapter 25 of Leviticus and gives to Moses the information and regulations concerning the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee. Israel was intended to have a king because it was a sample nation. We will never understand fully why God selected this people to be his chosen people in the unique way that the Scriptures set forth unless we recognize that they were to be a demonstration, a model nation, to teach the rest of the nations how God operates in the world, how he desires and intends to run every nation. This is why what was said to Israel regarding government is so significant. It is a representation of God's relationship with the other nations of the world.

In the first seven verses you have the instructions concerning **the sabbatical year**:

**The LORD said to Moses on Mount Sinai, “Say to the people of Israel, When you come into the land which I give you, the land shall keep a sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its fruits; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land a sabbath to the LORD, you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. What grows of itself in your harvest you shall not reap, and the grapes of your undressed vine you shall not gather; it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. The sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired servant and the sojourner who lives with you; for your cattle also and for the beasts that are in your land all its yield shall be for food.” {Lev 25:1-7 RSV}**

We are already familiar with the weekly sabbath, with the fact that God had marked out one day in seven to be observed by this people as a day of rest from labor. You recall that as we looked at that together we discovered that it is a very important principle. This sabbath lies at the heart of everything God does, from creation on, because he is trying to drive home to human hearts an absolutely necessary truth, one which is fundamental to our humanity, and that is that we must operate out of rest. Haven't you discovered that in your own life? It is so stressful when we are filled with anxiety and pressure, and when in all our frenetic activity we get restless and feverish and upset, and we press on thinking that it all depends upon us, that we've got to get everything done ourselves. It drives us crazy, because we don't have enough time nor energy and we don't have the opportunity we need!

But God is trying to show us that that was never his design for human lives. Men are to operate out of rest. Rest is dependence upon the activity of Another. When you rest and relax and depend on someone else you are invoking the activity of a second Person. And that is the fundamental secret of humanity which God labors to teach us all through the Scriptures, in the Old and the New Testaments alike. He is prepared to work through us – not apart from us, not with folded hands on our part – but in our activity to be there, supplying what it takes to get done what is necessary. That is the secret of rest. And when the weekly sabbath was observed it taught the people that this was to be true of the individual.

Now we come to the sabbatical year. Not only was one day out of seven to be rested, but one year out of seven. Every seventh year Israel was to let the land rest for a year. They were not to sow any crops nor to reap anything. They were not even to prune the vineyards but were to let the trees and the vines grow without hindrance. They were even to eat nothing which grew of itself, but were to let the land lie entirely fallow. You recognize that this is a very important principle of horticulture. You can write the U.S. Department of Agriculture and they will send you pamphlets which urge you to allow your land to rest every now and then. The result will be, as this passage tells us in Verse 6, an increase of yield. You will get much more out of the land if you let it rest periodically, because it needs to rest.

Today we understand that this is a fundamental scientific fact, on the physical level, already anticipated here in this ancient book. But it is far more than that! Never restrict your interpretation of Scripture only to the level of the physical life. It is also to be applied to the spiritual realm. The sabbath is applicable, as God is teaching us here, beyond the life of the individual to society at large. What he is trying to drive home here is that if there is a recognition of, and dependence upon, God's ability to work in social life, in interpersonal relationships, in government, a very important result will obtain which cannot be obtained in any other way. There will be fruitfulness in life.

We will see this developed further as we go into this passage, for that is the significance of the sabbatical year.

With it is linked **the year of jubilee**, which follows immediately in the text, beginning with Verse 8:

**“And you shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall send abroad the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall send abroad the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you; in it you shall neither sow, nor reap what grows of itself, nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee, it shall be holy to you, you shall eat what it yields out of the field.”**  
{Lev 25:8-12 RSV}

Notice that the year of jubilee, which came every fiftieth year, was but the intensification of the sabbatical year. The sabbatical year was to be observed every seventh year. And when seven times seven had passed, forty-nine years, then the next year was declared the year of jubilee. This is very instructive because it indicates that whatever the sabbatical year stood for is to be worked out in principle and that the results will finally become fully manifest in the fiftieth year.

These numbers were chosen because they are symbolically significant. Seven is the number of perfection. So seven times seven is perfection fully manifested. In other words, God is saying that whatever the sabbath year stands for, if you allow it to run its full course, will manifest itself in a complete and open demonstration of something.

What is that something?

It is stated in one word in this text: *Liberty*.

This is the way you free people from social problems, injustices, and inequities. It all works out at last in a year of liberty.

I wonder if you caught the important words in Verse 10. They are quoted in a very well-known place. “And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants...” Do you know where? On the Liberty Bell, that great bell which stands for American independence. It was cracked, as you know, and now it hangs in Independence Hall, Philadelphia. Around the top of the bell are inscribed these words: ***Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof*** {Lev 25:10b KJV}. This is a wonderful manifestation of how much our forebears knew about the great principle which God is seeking to get across to men here in this teaching of the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee.

You see, rest must be at the heart not only of the individual but of society as well. There must be dependence upon the working of Another, upon the fact that God can do something in human events, that he knows how to work out relationships among the people. A recognition of that fact and an open door to allow him to do it will result finally in the working out of liberty. That is what this passage is saying to us so beautifully.

By the way, two consecutive years were to be observed as sabbath years: the forty-ninth year would be a sabbatical year, and the fiftieth was a year of jubilee. So there would be two years without the planting of crops. This created a problem which we'll face in a few minutes: How were the people to eat during that time?

The year of jubilee was to be announced by trumpet. Trumpets always herald a new beginning. The first day of the seventh month was the feast of trumpets every year, and trumpets were sent out to announce the new year, a new beginning. Now in the fiftieth year, on the tenth day of the seventh month, was the great day of atonement, when the

blood of a bull and a goat was offered in the holy of holies and God made atonement for all the people. On that day the trumpet went abroad in the announcement of liberty. This is God's very graphic way of teaching us that all liberty arises out of redemption. It arises out of the work of God in human affairs – cleansing and changing, forgiving and healing and restoring. If liberty doesn't come from that, it can never be achieved.

We all tend to think that liberty is doing what you want to do whenever you want to do it. But nothing could be worse. There is no greater form of slavery. You need have only a little experience of it to see how empty, how binding, how boring that kind of life is:

I have been privileged to travel extensively and to speak oftentimes to rather wealthy audiences. I was in Hollywood, Florida, a few weeks ago, on the so-called “gold coast” of Florida. Every morning I taught the Scriptures to a crowd of five hundred or more. These people, I was told, represented well over a billion dollars' worth of accumulated wealth. I had the opportunity to talk with many of them individually. I found that most of these, by their own testimony, though they had all the money to buy anything they wanted, had arrived at the place where they were suffering from what someone has so aptly called “destination sickness” – the malady of having everything that you want, but not wanting anything you have, and being sick and empty and lonely and miserable because you can do anything you want to do.

No, that is not liberty. Liberty, God says, is being freed from inner bondage, inner shackles of guilt and fear and anxiety and hostility. And it begins with redemption, with the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

It consists, you notice, of two wonderful elements. Liberty, God says, is for each person

- to regain his lost inheritance, and
- to have his broken relationships restored.

It is to get back what God intended you to have, to return to your property, to be able to be and act as God intended men to be and act when he made them in the beginning, to gain back all that was lost in the fall of Adam. It is to have all the broken, fragmented relationships restored, have all the middle walls of partition which have separated men and kept them apart broken down, to have all the differences of skin color and culture and class

evaporated, and to return to your family. That is the beauty of this picture. And it is to be a sabbath, a year of rest.

Verses 13-17 indicate more about this and are very significant:

**“In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property. And if you sell to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. According to the number of years after the jubilee, you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years for crops he shall sell to you. If the years are many you shall increase the price, and if the years are few you shall diminish the price, for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you. You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God.” {Lev 25:13-17 RSV}**

There is the meaning of the year of jubilee. It was to be the center of all commercial enterprise. Everything looked toward this liberation, this freeing of individuals. And according to the number of years left before the year of jubilee the price of land was established. A buyer paid a reduced price if the year of jubilee were near because in that year the land had to revert to its original owner, no matter to whom it belonged at the time. But if there were a long period ensuing, up to fifty years, a much heavier price was paid because, as God underscored in Verse 16, it was the number of crops which was being sold. “You are not buying the land,” he says, “you are buying the use of the land, that’s all.” God is trying to teach a great truth by this fact.

This is a paramount principle which will be developed further in the next few verses, for in Verses 18-22 you have the heart of this chapter. Here are gathered up **the great principles involved in the year of jubilee**, which is itself an intensification of the sabbath year. This is God’s effort to teach us that he is at work in government and society, as well as in an individual’s heart. We must make room for him and expect him to work there too, and if we do, it will make a fantastic difference!

**“Therefore you shall do my statutes, and keep my ordinances and perform them; so you will dwell in the land securely. The**

**land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill, and dwell in it securely. And if you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, so that it will bring forth fruit for three years. When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating old produce; until the ninth year, when its produce comes in, you shall eat the old.” {Lev 25:18-22 RSV}**

Here’s the answer to the question people would normally raise: “Well, if we have to let the land lie absolutely fallow for a year and cannot reap any crops or harvest any grapes or anything, how are we going to eat?” And God says, “That’s exactly what I wanted you to ask, because I’m trying to impress a principle upon you: It isn’t the land which supports you; it is I. I will make the land produce enough for three years. Every seventh year I want you to experience the fact that I am able to take care of you despite the outward circumstances, that it is I upon whom you are dependent, not the land, not your own energy and labor, although that is part of the picture. But that is not where your well-being arises. It comes from me. Every sixth year I’ll increase the crops so that the seventh year you can eat of the sixth year’s crops, the eighth year, the year of jubilee, you can still eat from that crop, and the ninth year, while another harvest is maturing, you will still eat from the sixth year’s crops; thus you’ll have all you need to eat.”

So God makes a beautiful three-fold promise:

- First, security: “Keep my ordinances and perform them, so you will dwell in the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill, and dwell in it securely.” This forms a parenthesis. At the beginning and the end of this great promise he emphasizes that no one will attack you, no enemy will come against you, you’ll be safe and secure if you learn this principle of rest at work in government.
- Second, you will be able to produce the crop without struggle: “The land will yield its fruit.” With relative ease you can grow this crop. Arduous toil and sweat and pain and trouble and tears won’t be necessary. The land will readily produce its crop.



- Third, there will be a sufficiency of supply: “You will eat your fill.” All you can eat! Every seventh year, and every fiftieth year, you will have all you want, because God is at work.

Now, that is what God wants us to learn. But how sadly we have forgotten it! Once this American nation had strong glimpses of this truth. We even stamped it on our coins: “In God We Trust.” We wrote it on the Liberty Bell. But then we forgot it. We thought it all depended upon us. We no longer made any allowance for God to work. We failed to carry out the rest of the requirements of this chapter, as we will see, and our land began to fall apart – as any land does. Remember that Israel is a sample nation. It was given to us as an example of how God wants to act toward any nation. That is why these words are so important to us.

I have mentioned before that I’ve always been impressed by the instructive motto of the state of Hawaii. It is a result of the influence of the missionaries who first came to Hawaii in 1820. It expresses a great truth in the Hawaiian language: *Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono* which means, “The life of the land is preserved in righteousness.” That is what preserves a nation. It isn’t its Declaration of Independence, nor its Constitution. It isn’t its Congress, nor its laws. It is the righteousness of its people, the reflection of their recognition of their need for God, worked out in their relationships with one another.

This is what this passage teaches. God will make full and abundant provision, supernatural supply, in these years.

The sad thing is that Israel never experienced this. Never once did they ever have a sabbatical year! In all their history they never trusted God enough to try it out and see what he would do. And so they never saw God’s supply. They never learned that he would keep his word. And this is the reason why, after 490 years of living in the land, the nation had degenerated to become a moral cancer. So God allowed the Babylonians to sweep them off the land and remove them to captivity. Jeremiah was told that they would be captives in the land of Babylon for 70 years because that is the number of sabbatical years they had failed to observe. You see how this underscores the truth that God always gets his way, despite man’s rebellion. You can never cheat God. He had been counting up all the years Israel had forgotten. The end of

the sixth year came and Israel didn’t have the faith to trust in God’s promise and so they planted their crop in the seventh year. And God let them go ahead. He doesn’t stop people if they insist on doing wrong. But he kept a record for 490 years, 70 of which were sabbatical years. At the end of that time he said, “Now we’ll give the land its rest, while you’re in captivity in Babylon.” And it did rest. Nobody used it. Nobody farmed it for 70 years because God wanted to impress this great truth upon his people.

Now **the purpose of the jubilee year** is given to us in three great principles, beginning with Verse 23:

**“The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the country you possess, you shall grant a redemption of the land.” {Lev 25:23-24 RSV}**

Here is the reason God has instituted the year of jubilee:

1. It is, first of all, to teach this great fact: The land is God’s. It doesn’t belong to anyone else. “The land shall never be sold in perpetuity. It cannot be possessed forever. It belongs to me.” This is still true, is it not? You and I know that. We don’t really own our land. In fact, if we don’t pay taxes on it we will lose the right to it that we do have. We don’t own it as individuals, the government owns it. But even the government doesn’t own it.

I love history and I revel in the rich and glowing historic background of California. As I have driven around in the Mother Lode country and other historic regions, it has often struck me: Where are the people who once inhabited these places? Where are the ones who once walked here, who built these cities and owned these houses, and who ran things to suit themselves in that day? Where are they now? They said they owned the land, but they didn’t own it. They passed it on to us. And we don’t own it. We must pass it on to someone else. And God says again and again, all through life, “You don’t own this land; it’s mine.”

Just as an aside, this ought to settle the question now being debated in the United Nations: Who owns the land of Palestine – the

Arabs or the Jews? God says, “Neither. It’s mine. I’ll put there whomever I want to put there, and I’m not waiting for the United Nations to decide. The land is mine.”

2. The second great principle, deriving from the first, is: “You are strangers and sojourners with me.” That is, “This earth is not the end. The reason I want you to know that the land is not yours is that I want you to remember that this life is not all there is. You are only passing through, you are pilgrims, heading on to an infinitely vaster arena of life. What you are doing here is of great importance in connection with that, true, but this is not the end. This life is schooling you for the life which lies ahead, so don’t wrap yourself in the material things around you and live only for them. I want you to know that you are strangers and sojourners with me.”
3. And, finally, and even now this is a great and important, point, the third principle is: “And in all the country you possess, you shall grant a redemption of the land.” In the ideal situation, with God living and ruling among his people, he intended for them to live in this way: every seventh year they would let the land rest, and every fiftieth year they would grant a jubilee, when everyone would return to their own land, when all personal property would be restored, when slaves would be set free, etc. And this is a very graphic representation of the fact that God knows that even in such a condition there would still be inequities and injustices. So he says that they must allow the right to recover from injury and damage and loss of personal property. This is an indispensable principle in government. Governments must face up to the fact that they have the responsibility to grant the right to recover from a low economic state.

As you examine the rest of this passage you can see that is dealing with **the problem of economic distress**, with poverty:

- Verse 25: “If your brother becomes poor...”
- Verse 35: “And if your brother becomes poor, and cannot maintain himself...”
- Verse 39: “And if your brother becomes poor beside you...”

- Verse 47: “If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich, and your brother beside him becomes poor...”

What are you going to do? These are God’s instructions on how to deal with poverty. We are not going to take time to read them now. You can study them through for yourself. But all the way through, this section is merely an amplification of the great statement in Verse 24: “And in all the country you possess, you shall grant a redemption of the land.” You must give an opportunity to recover from this situation. You must not merely shrug your shoulders and say, “Well, the poor are poor because they are too lazy to work,” or something like that. You’ve got to give them a chance to recover! You must not lock them into a condition which makes it impossible for them to recover. Recovery from poverty is a fundamental right which governments must learn to respect.

This is the great issue which seethes and throbs beneath the surface in every land on earth today. What is causing the sense of distress and injustice and inequity among peoples all over the world? It is the fact that they face a system which, at least in their view, does not permit them to recover out of poverty. They have no way of breaking the stranglehold upon them and of improving their economic lot. And God says, “You must do something about that. You must help your brother.” This is a word that governments must face.

The passage goes on to outline specific circumstances:

1. First, you must give a person the right to redeem his own land, Verses 25-34. If he can’t do that, listen to these words, Verses 35-38:

**“And if your brother becomes poor, and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall maintain him; as a stranger and a sojourner he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or increase, but fear your God; that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.” {Lev 25:35-38 RSV}**

You who have wealth, who have been blessed, must not forget the poor. You must not leave them struggling, unable to do anything about it. Even though they are so reduced that you have to keep them for awhile, you must do so. You mustn't just write them off. You can see that this economic concern is born from the recognition that God is at work in human hearts and lives and in human society.

2. The next division, Verses 39-46, takes up the case of slavery. No Israelite was to be a slave. They were permitted to make slaves of the people around them, because those people hadn't yet discovered the principle which makes for liberty – atonement and redemption – and until a person learns that, there is no freedom from slavery. But when they did learn that and became part of Israel they were never to be made slaves. They could be servants but never slaves.
3. And, finally, Verses 47-55, there must be the right, even then, to redeem slaves, to buy a person back and restore him to his dignity as a human being. All this is God's graphic way of teaching us that he can work in human hearts and human society. God has ways of changing people. And if we observe the fundamental principle of rest, of dependence on the activity of Another, and expect him to do it, then over a period of time it will work out to liberty.

What a commentary this is, and what a correction of the way we usually operate. We are always rushing around and putting Band-Aids on the cancerous sores of society – always trying to put out fires which breakout, without catching the arsonist. But God never does that. He strikes at the root of the problem. He says, "If you will deal with it at this level, then over a period of time it will gradually work out. In the meantime you must take care of those in need. But the result will be liberty, and men will be able to have their own property again. It will all come out into the year of jubilee."

Now, that has application on the physical level and we must not deny it. And it has application on the spiritual level. It is clearly evident that as we recognize this tremendous principle of God at work in human lives, liberty is the result.

History is full of illustrations of this fact:

- William Wilberforce, in the English Parliament, pleaded with great passion for an end to the African slave trade. He was motivated by the Christian concern of his heart and by his conviction that this was not God's choice for human beings.
- Behind most of the beneficial social movements of history has been Christian compassion and concern. This can be demonstrated even in the case of countries like Russia and others whose officials deny the presence of God in history – nevertheless, social concern arises from Christian sources.
- Florence Nightingale, whose work gave birth to the Red Cross, was motivated by Christian compassion, and by the recognition that God can do something to alleviate human misery.
- And I don't hesitate to say that in the civil rights movement of our own land, led by Martin Luther King and the others who gathered with him, and characterized by the hymn *We Shall Overcome*, there was a recognition that God is concerned with human affairs, and that he could and would work when people expected him to do so and gave him the opportunity. That is what works out in liberty.

So the final lesson of this chapter is summarized in this great statement: **"The life of the land is preserved in righteousness."**

God has a place in human history. God can work in your life as an individual and give you rest so that you do not operate out of anxiety and tension and hostility. And he can do the same in social situations. He can do it in a company, in a community, in a nation. To the extent that principle is recognized problems can be worked out without violence.

#### Prayer:

Heavenly Father, help us to learn these principles. Forgive us for the folly of thinking that we have to do everything ourselves. Help us to learn the fantastically important lesson that we are dependent creatures, and that you're ready to respond to us if we recognize our dependence upon you. How much of Scripture has thundered this at us, and yet how we ignore it!

The True Basis of Social Concern

Lord, help us as a people to repent, to humble ourselves and seek your face, to cry out in prayer unto you, that you may

heal our land. We thank you for that promise. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Either / Or

by Ray C. Stedman

In Joshua 24 is the account of the time when Joshua gathered the people of Israel together at Shechem and set before them the choice they had to make – whether to serve other gods or the God of Israel. On that occasion Joshua also obeyed the command of God to have the blessings and the cursings of the Law read to the people.

When I was in Israel in January, I drove through ancient Shechem and saw the mountains from which these curses and blessings were read – Mount Ebal and Mount Gerazim. The curses were read from Mount Ebal and the blessings from Mount Gerazim. Right in front of them on the plain, by the way, is the well of Jacob, the well of Sychar, where Jesus sat and taught the Samaritan woman, as recorded in John 4. I thought of this great scene in Joshua as I looked at these two mountains, separated by a very narrow valley, from which the cursings and blessings were read every year. And Chapter 26 of Leviticus is the chapter which sets them forth.

These blessings and curses characterize the dealings of God with his people Israel. This is a particularly noteworthy chapter because it has been fulfilled in history. We can compare what God said would take place with what actually has happened. As we go through this chapter you will see what remarkable confirmation we have in history of all that God has said he would do with his people.

The chapter opens by repeating **two of the ten commandments**:

**“You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no graven image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land, to bow down to them; for I am the LORD your God. You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.” {Lev 26:1-2 RSV}**

In other words, here are restated the second commandment (“Thou shalt not make any graven images ... nor bow down to them”) and the fourth commandment (“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”). The reason these two are repeated here at this point is that it is the violation of the second commandment which produces curses in a life and it is the observance of the fourth commandment which produces blessings.

Idolatry – having some other god besides God – is the great threat. If you think that idolatry consists only of bowing down to actual images, you are very mistaken. America is one of the most idolatrous nations in the history of the world. Our idols are not graven images but nevertheless are gods before whom we worship – the god of materialism, the goddess of sex. The ancients had names for them. Venus was the goddess of sex and was worshipped in the form of an image. But they

were worshipping sex just as Americans do today. There were other gods – the god of war, Thor, as the Scandinavians called him. We worship the god of war. We also worship various minor deities and gods – our children, our automobiles. I see many a person on Sunday morning out polishing his god. This idolatry is what produces cursings.

But the observance of the Sabbath is what produces blessings. As we have seen in this whole book of Leviticus, the Sabbath day, Saturday, is a shadow, a picture of the rest out of which God wants man to learn to operate. It is dependence upon the work of Another, and therefore it results in calmness, absence of stress and anxiety, freedom from turbulence and tumult within. It is rest in the work of God, in his ability to work through you. That is the sabbath, and that is what produces blessings.

Following these two commandments we have the listing of **the cursings and the blessings**, beginning with the blessings. From Verse 3 through Verse 13 there are six blessings promised. See if you can pick them out as we read this passage, just as it was read every year when Israel gathered at the foot of the mountain of blessings, Mount Gerazim:

**“If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall last to the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last to the time for sowing; and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land securely. And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; and I will remove evil beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. And I will have regard for you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and will confirm my covenant with you. And you shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. And I will make my abode among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk**

**among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; and I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.” {Lev 26:3-13 RSV}**

What a beautiful passage! What a beautiful array of promises. And God meant every word! When he asked them to observe his commandments he wasn't referring to the ten commandments alone. He knew that fallen human nature, with its inbuilt tendency to self-sufficiency, would never be able to keep them. God knew that. He meant not only the ten commandments but all the provisions for redemption which were provided with them – the offerings, the sacrifices, the cleansings, the healings, and all the other provisions which, in type, speak of Jesus Christ. In other words, “If you walk before me,” he said, “using the provision which I have made available to you to deal with the sin and rebellion of your heart, then these blessings will be yours.” What possibilities lay before this people at this time!

The blessings are six-fold. You can see as we go through this list that there is a counterpart for each of these in the spiritual life today. God meant this materially and physically for his people Israel, but it is also a picture of the spiritual blessings which are ours in our lives today, on the same condition. So this passage has direct application to us.

- The first promise is fruitfulness. God said, “I'll make you fruitful. Your land will bring forth its fruit.” Your life will be fruitful. It will be a blessing to others. You will have an effective impact upon others.
- Second, there will be full supply: “Your threshing shall last to the time of vintage, and the vintage to the time of sowing; and you shall eat your bread to the full.” You will have all you need, every resource will be provided for you.
- Third, you will have security: “I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.” No enemy that will come against you shall be able to overwhelm you or take you captive. God will protect you. You will have peace in your land, or,

in our terms, peace in your life. No enemy can overwhelm you, no threat can be too great for you, no attack can overthrow you; you shall be secure.

- The fourth blessing is increase: “I will have regard for you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and will confirm my covenant with you.” In the spiritual application, your life will affect others. You will find the extent of your influence moving out, reaching out to larger dimensions.
- And, fifth, you will have a divine sense of God’s presence, of fellowship with the Living God. “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” You will have an intimate sense of communion with God.
- All of this is guaranteed by the nature and character of God, the One who delivered Israel from the land of Egypt, the One who is able, sixth, to deliver and to dignify, to make people “walk erect,” as men and women ought to walk and to live. That is the kind of God he is and that is what he says he will do.

These blessings find their counterparts in our own lives in terms of the spiritual effectiveness and fruitfulness which God will produce if we lay hold of the provision that he has made for us in Jesus Christ, and if we deal honestly and openly with him. That is all God asks. He doesn’t ask us to be sinless; he asks us to be honest. He asks us not to kid ourselves, not to try to pretend, not to erect a facade, a wall that we hide behind, not to put on a mask which is not real, but to be honest and open and to avail ourselves of the resources that he has given in Jesus Christ.

Now, Israel did not keep these blessings. Israel chose otherwise. So the next section of the book deals with the cursings. And these cursings are what has occurred in Israel’s history. You will see that they fall into six definite stages, each one worse than the previous one, which God says will develop if the people turn against him, and refuse to hear his words and to obey, and won’t avail themselves of the provisions that he has made. Now hear these, beginning with Verse 14:

**“But if you will not hearken to me, and will not do all these commandments, if you**

**spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my ordinances, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, I will do this to you:” {Lev 26:14-16a RSV}**

This too is God’s promise. These curses follow, and they too have spiritual counterparts. There are parallel punishments, or cursings, which we will experience in our lives, as the people of God, if we too refuse to walk in God’s ways and avail ourselves of his provision – if, in other words, we walk in the flesh instead of in the Spirit. And they are just as sure as the blessings would have been. Notice these six stages as we work through this passage.

1. The first is given in Verses 16-17:

**“I will appoint over you sudden terror, consumption, and fever that waste the eyes and cause life to pine away. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it; I will set my face against you, and you shall be smitten before your enemies; those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you.” {Lev 26:16b-17 RSV}**

There are two parts of this first mark of God’s disciplining hand:

- First, disease would break out among the people. As you read the record of Israel for forty years in the wilderness, all the way from Egypt to the borders of the promised land, you find that they were not afflicted with disease except for special punishments of temporary disobedience on their part. God kept them from illness because he had promised them that, if they obeyed his commandments, the diseases of the Egyptians and the Canaanites would not come upon them. So when disease began to erupt among them it was a sign that they were turning from God’s word and from his will.

The counterpart is true with us. These diseases, as we have seen in this book of Leviticus, are pictures of moral blotches in our own life, of wrong attitudes – resentment, bitterness, malice, lovelessness, in-

difference. These are spiritual diseases which can afflict the believer. And when these begin to appear in your life, they are a sign that something is wrong, that there has been some disobedience, some failure to avail yourself of all that God has provided in Jesus Christ. So God has allowed the malady in order that you might turn again to him.

- There was a second part of this first stage of discipline: conflict. “You shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.” There would be conflict with the tribes around Israel. This occurred throughout the history of this people, beginning with rather minor harassment but eventually escalating to horrendous proportions.

In the spiritual counterpart this too is true of us. Arguments arise and become conflicts, strife results in schism and separation, and factions break away. This is a sign among the people of God that they are beginning to turn from what God has provided, that they are not fully availing themselves of their possession and inheritance in Jesus Christ. And this is sent to turn them back.

2. But if it doesn't, God moves to a second stage. He gives us that in Verses 18-20:

**“And if in spite of this [which was given in order to get you to listen] you will not hearken to me, then I will chastise you again sevenfold for your sins, and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like brass; and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.” {Lev 26:18-20 RSV}**

The second stage consisted, first, of an immediate seven-fold increase of the first stage, and second, added to this would be drought. “I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like brass; and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land will not yield its increase.” Crops would dry up and famine would come.

This occurred in the history of Israel again and again.

The counterpart on the spiritual level is depression. Drought is barrenness, lack of life, a sense of futility, of the hopelessness of it all – depression, in other words. This is oftentimes a mark of someone who is failing, either through ignorance or willfulness, to understand and to avail himself of all that God has provided for us.

3. Then there comes a third stage, Verses 21-22:

**“Then if you walk contrary to me, and will not hearken to me, I will bring more plagues upon you, sevenfold as many as your sins. And I will let loose the wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, so that your ways shall become desolate.” {Lev 26:21-22 RSV}**

In the history of Israel, as drought came and their crops dried up, the wilderness areas of the land were also affected. And the wild animals, not having sufficient food, came into the villages and cities and actually attacked people right in the streets, and killed their children, just as God had said would happen.

Once again this is a picture of something in our own lives. The attack of wild beasts is a picture of that unprovoked attack which may come to an individual, some sudden threat to his well-being or even to his life which comes from an unexpected source. Other people oftentimes act like wild beasts who want to take away everything we possess and devour us. This again is often a mark of spiritual declension, as God indicates.

4. Then there comes yet a fourth stage, Verses 23-26:

**“And if by this discipline you are not turned to me, but walk contrary to me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I myself will smite you sevenfold for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant; and if you gather within your cities I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.”**



**When I break your staff of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and shall deliver your bread again by weight; and you shall eat, and not be satisfied.” {Lev 26:23-26 RSV}**

In the fourth stage there is to be a seven-fold intensification of all the afflictions that have already been mentioned – disease and conflict and drought and wild beasts – and there also will be an invasion of the land. Enemies will be permitted to come in and take over. This will be accompanied by pestilence and widespread famine among the people, so that women will have to share ovens – ten women baking in one oven. And so scarce is the bread, so small the loaves, that when it is delivered people will eat them up and yet remain unsatisfied. This is a picture of famine throughout the land. You can read of the historical fulfillment of this in the records of the Kings and the Chronicles. All this actually befell this people as they persisted in their disobedience and in turning from the provision God had given.

Again in the spiritual life this has its counterparts of moral decline and of a lack of satisfaction in the things of God, a sense of restlessness and of famine for spiritual substance.

5. But then there comes a fifth stage, Verses 27-33:

**“And if in spite of this you will not hearken to me, but walk contrary to me, then I will walk contrary to you in fury, and chastise you myself sevenfold for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols; and my soul will abhor you. And I will lay your cities waste, and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odors. And I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you; and your land shall be a**

**desolation, and your cities shall be a waste.” {Lev 26:27-33}**

What a remarkable prediction – and all fulfilled in history! You know that for thousands of years the Jewish people have wandered across the face of the earth as a desolate, scattered people. Cast out of their land, exiled among the nations, with no temple of their own, no central place of worship, they have been hounded and harassed from place to place wherever they have gone. Even before they were exiled these words were literally fulfilled. They actually ate their own children in the terrible famine during the siege of Jerusalem when the Roman general Titus surrounded the city in A.D. 70 and created such starvation within the walls that the inhabitants ended up eating the dead bodies of those who perished from day to day. Josephus gives a vivid account of this actual fulfillment in history. God did what he said he would do.

But remember that this also has its counterpart in the spiritual life. There is a fifth stage of spiritual decline which means the breakup of a family, the loss of sons and daughters, atrocities of various sorts, moral perversities, the overthrowing of that which you have depended upon, the idol you thought would sustain you, whatever it might be. The result is utter devastation and, ultimately, some form of exile from the presence and power of God.

6. But there is still a sixth stage, Verses 34-39:

**“Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest which it had not in your sabbaths when you dwelt upon it. [From a previous study you remember how literally this was fulfilled. Israel was taken into captivity in Babylon for seventy years because they had failed to observe seventy sabbath years prior to that.] And as for those of you that are left, I will send faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; the sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight, and they shall flee as one flees**

**from the sword, and they shall fall when none pursues. They shall stumble over one another, as if to escape a sword, though none pursues; and you shall have no power to stand before your enemies. And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And those of you that are left shall pine away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity; and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall pine away like them.” {Lev 26:34-39 RSV}**

One of the strange mysteries of recent history is why the Jewish people in Europe, numbering eight million or more, would be so servile and submissive to the attacks upon them by the Nazis. Why didn't they resist? Why didn't they stand up and fight? The Jews themselves are troubled by this question. They have resolved that never again will they ever allow any such attack upon them without resistance. They themselves do not understand and cannot explain how they could submit so meekly to being lined up by the hundreds and thousands and herded into gas chambers and put to death without lifting a hand to resist. But God had said, “You shall be given faintness in your heart. You will not stand before your enemies. You will be afraid. You will flee when no one pursues, and a driven leaf will scare you – you will think someone is after you.” They would be characterized by faintness, by reduction in numbers, and by a terrible longing for the day when they would be delivered. All of this stands written in history, confirmed by the acts of men following the decrees of God.

Once again this has its counterpart in the spiritual life. There comes a time of utter moral collapse, utter decline, of alienation, and of being filled with restlessness and fear and trembling. All of this God has fulfilled in history and will fulfill in an individual life.

But now notice where all this is driving. The wonderful thing is that through it all God always has a redemptive, constructive goal toward which he is aiming, Verses 40-46:

**“But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery which they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity; then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land [that is, I'll remember to bring them back to it, after the land has its rest]. But the land shall be left by them, and enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my ordinances, and their soul abhorred my statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God; but I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.”**

**These are the statutes and ordinances and laws which the LORD made between him and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai by Moses. {Lev 26:40-46 RSV}**

Frederick the Great of Prussia one day asked his court preacher, “Can you, sir, give me in one word proof that the Bible is true?” And the preacher said, “Yes, I can. One word: Jew.”

The record of Israel, you see, is the proof that God means exactly what he says. And yet his purpose is that he will not destroy them utterly. He will not allow them to be wiped off the face of the earth but will accomplish his purpose and bring them back at last to the land.

Now what is your reaction to all this? Does it seem to you as though God is pictured here as cruel and heartless and demanding and stubborn because he afflicts people with this kind of trouble? If so, then you have read the passage all wrong. Because this is the story of the inflexibility of love, of the ruthlessness of grace. There is love behind the cursing as much as there is behind the blessing.

Notice what God is doing. From stage to stage he says, “Now I'll do this much. And if they turn back, I won't have to do more. But if they don't,

I'll move to the next stage. Because I'm not going to give up. I'm going to see to it that they return eventually." And the process moves from stage to stage until God inflexibly drives them to the place of utter despair, to the time when they will return. This is the way God works.

This is the law of the universe, the law of inevitable consequence, of the inflexible will of a Sovereign God who is determined to accomplish the redemption of his people but who nevertheless has bound himself never to violate their free will. This means that their will must be persuaded; it will never be coerced. And there is no greater persuasion than heartbreak and despair. Have you found that out?

C. S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures; he speaks to us in our work; but he shouts at us in our pains."

Sometimes God must almost break our hearts, sometimes he must actually break them, before we will take seriously what he has said to us and observe the provision he has made for us in Jesus Christ.

Seated in the congregation this morning is a man whose life's story is remarkable. I know he won't mind if I share it with you because he has shared it publicly with many of us. He is an eminent psychiatrist, and for many years was an agnostic, a hater of Christianity. He scorned it and attacked it whenever he could and tried to destroy it. He abused the general idea and the specific doctrines of Christianity, making fun of it in his lectures. But God was after him. Gradually things began to fall apart in his life until finally his little boy was accidentally drowned in a pool. When that happened there was awakened in this man a hunger to be with his son again. Drawn by that longing to share life yet with that beloved little boy he began to read assiduously and to take seriously the claims of Christianity. And there gradually dawned upon him a vision of what he himself was, of how he looked before God and others. He told us that as he finished reading one of C. S. Lewis' books it suddenly broke upon him how much he had done to his loved ones by his way of life and by his attitudes toward God. He simply dropped the book and said to himself, "You ass! You fool!" And at that moment he turned to God and God healed his heart, forgave him – and he sensed it, knew it. Even though it wasn't at all pleasant to face that

time of despair, nevertheless God healed him, and he has been growing in grace ever since.

I share that story with you because I want you to see how accurate this account still is. God hasn't changed at all. This is an inevitable rule of life. There is no other choice. There are no other alternatives. If you reject light, then you must endure darkness. If you will not receive the positive, then you must experience the negative. If you refuse warmth, then you must suffer cold. If you will not go in, then you must stay out – until the time comes when you're ready to go in. There are no other choices.

God is dealing like this with every one of us today. Behind what seem superficially to be cruel and hard and difficult circumstances is the relentless love of God who says, "I will never give you up. I'll never let you go. I will never give up on you. I'll never be easy on you until I get rid of your foolish attitude of rebellious self-sufficiency which is hurting you, destroying you, and making you less than what you want to be and what I want you to be."

That is the way God works with us. We sing it in the wonderful old hymn:

O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee;  
I give Thee back the life I owe,  
That in Thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

### Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for your relentless love, your inflexible purpose that we shall be conformed at last to the image of your Son. By its very nature this kind of love is determined, if necessary, to take us through sorrow and heartbreak, sadness and tears, but to bring us out at last into a great and wide place of blessing. We thank you for it. We don't like the process, Lord, but we know that it is what delivers us, what spares us and saves us. There may be some who are running as fast as they can and who think that they can avoid the God of the universe. Lord, help them to see how foolish that is, to realize that they cannot run far enough nor fast enough to escape the Hound of Heaven who pursues them, who longs to reach them and

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heal them. And thank you, Father, that you have reached us and are still dealing with us in this same faithful way. May we cooperate and yield ourselves to you, Lord,

obey your Word and believe it, and rise up to be men and women who are free of the yoke of bondage. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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## Promises, Promises, Promises

by Ray C. Stedman

We have come to that wondrous time when we will finish the book of Leviticus. I almost feel like standing and singing *Auld Lang Syne*, for it seems as if we are leaving an old friend. I have grown to love this old book in a new and fresh way as we have been working through it these many weeks together and seeing the marvelous pictures by which God teaches us, as his children in the kindergarten of faith, the lessons that he has for us. This book has come to be of rich meaning to me, more than ever before, and I hope that is true for you also.

In the twenty-seventh chapter God, most appropriately, ends his instructions to his people with a word about vows to him. Whether you call them vows or resolutions or determinations or promises, they are all in the same category and God has certain instructions for us about them which it is important that we understand.

This latter section of Leviticus is dealing with human behavior. The book began with instruction and revelation to us about our basic humanity, our basic human needs. Then it told us God's provision to meet those needs. Finally it moved into this area of the behavior expected of us on the basis of the provision God has made. It is appropriate, therefore, that it should end by dealing with the promises that we make to God in response to what he has done for us.

These promises, as you well know from your own experience, are made in times of danger, or in moments of strong desire, or sometimes out of gratitude and thanksgiving as God has blessed our hearts. If you have ever said, "Lord, if you'll just do such-and-such, then I'll do such-and-such for you," then you will be very interested in what this chapter has to say.

I must point out immediately that in all the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments alike, God never commands a vow. Vows are never mandatory, never obligatory, upon the people of God. You don't have to promise God anything in order to get something from him. God is a Giver. He delights in giving; that is his nature. "Every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change," James tells us {Jas 1:17 RSV}. Because God is a God of love, he delights in giving. John Oxenham says,

Love ever lives  
and ever stands with open hands  
and while it lives, it gives  
for this is love's prerogative  
to give and give and give.

God is always giving, and there is nothing that you need from God which, in order to obtain, you must promise him something in return. All this is voluntary on your part.

And yet it is significant that there is something innate in human beings which makes us want to vow, to promise new resolutions or determinations to God. So God recognizes that tendency and makes room for it, and he gives us instructions about it. You remember that when he left home Jacob made a vow in an attempt to bargain with God. There are records in the Scriptures of many others who made various vows before God. This is certainly something with which we all identify. And what the Scriptures everywhere also teach is that once you make a vow, God expects you to fulfill it. If you turn to the next book in the Bible, Numbers, and look at Chapter 30 you will see how clearly that is stated in the opening verses:

**Moses said to the heads of the tribes of the people of Israel, “This is what the Lord has commanded. When a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.” {Num 30:1-2 RSV}**

He doesn't have to make the vow. But once he makes it, God expects him to keep it. There are various passages which remind us of that fact. Proverbs says, “It is better never to vow, than to make a vow and not pay it.” So God does expect us to fulfill the promises we make to him during the course of our life.

There are several categories of vows listed in this chapter. We are not going to get involved with the details of them because they largely apply to the then prevailing conditions of the nation Israel in their relationship with God. But the principles behind them are of permanent application, and with these we will be concerned.

1. The first category is those **vows made concerning persons**, Verses 1-8:

**The LORD said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, When a man makes a special vow of persons to the LORD at your valuation, then your valuation of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. [That was a considerable amount, a very high valuation.] If the person is a female, your valuation shall be thirty shekels. If the person is from five years old up to twenty years old, your valuation shall be for a male twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels. If the person is from a month old up to five years old, your valuation shall be for a male five shekels of silver, and for a female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver. And if the person is sixty years old and upward, then your valuation for a male shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. And if a man is too poor to pay your valuation, then he shall bring the person before the priest, and the priest shall value him; accord-**

**ing to the ability of him who vowed the priest shall value him.” {Lev 27:1-8 RSV}**

There are several items which require comment in that passage:

- First of all, you will notice that the nature of this vow is that it was made about persons, either about the individual who made the vow himself, or often it was a vow made out of desire for the benefit of someone else a parent, a child, a servant, or a friend. As we all know, there are times when we become concerned about someone and tend to pray, “Lord, if you'll just do such-and-such for this person, then I'll do something for you. I'll invest to an unusual degree in your work.” What it amounts to here is that in Israel they were saying to God, “I'll support the work of the priesthood and give above and beyond what I ordinarily would give if you'll just benefit or bless or help so-and-so.”
- When a promise of this nature was made there was a scale of values predetermined by God which Moses was to transmit and from which he was not free to deviate in any degree. If the person in question were a certain age and sex then there was an amount set for him or her, and that had to be paid if the blessing was received. God gave careful instructions to his people regarding this kind of promise.

From the Women's Liberation point of view, Moses here is a male chauvinist pig, for this scale of values differs between the male and the female. But we must remind ourselves that this is not at all an assessment of the worth of the persons before God. In both the Old and the New Testaments, there are clear statements that men and women are of equal value and standing as persons before God. As Paul says in Galatians, “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female...” All distinctions, including sex, are wiped out when we are standing in the presence of God and our worth to him is being evaluated.

Rather, this is a reckoning of the opportunity for service before men. Differences of age and sex, in Israel, made for varying opportunities to serve and thus for different values. That is what is recognized here – the obligation of service which could be rendered to the priesthood to further its outreach and strengthen its ministry within the nation of Israel, on the basis of the person who received the benefit, who was blessed.

- It is clear from Verse 8 that other people are involved: “And if a man is too poor to pay your valuation, then he shall bring the person [about whom he made this vow] before the priest, and the priest shall value him.”

Note that he was not to bring him to Moses, but to the priest. That indicates that there are two kinds of vows. You see, provision was made here in Verse 8 for inability to pay. Moses is always the representative of the throne, the government, the way of God, while the priest is always the representative of the grace and mercy of God, the tender character of his love.

If a man were bargaining with God on a legalistic basis: “I’ll do this for you, if you’ll do that for me,” then he had to pay the full price. There was no way that he could get out of it. Moses could not lessen or change the price in any way. God demanded full deliverance of what was promised.

On the spiritual level, of course, this applies to us. If we promise God certain things in moments of danger, or if we try to bargain with him, try to get him to work for us, God expects us to pay to the full exactly what we promise. But if a man recognized that he didn’t have what it took, that he was too poor to pay the price, he could still offer a promise to God out of thanksgiving and gratitude, but the priest, the representative of God’s grace, would enter the picture and, in a sense, intercede on his behalf and establish a valuation he could meet.

This is a beautiful picture of those vows and promises we make not to bargain with God

but to express to him our thanksgiving for all that he has been to us. When our hearts are melted by grace and we stand awed in his presence and say, “Lord, here I am, take me,” or “Here are my children, Lord, take them and use them as you like,” these are vows made on a gracious basis, and God promises to meet any attendant need himself. What the people of God cannot gain by the Law they can have by grace and, as the New Testament puts it, “exceeding abundantly above all they could ask or think,” {cf, Eph 3:20 KJV}. That is the way God always operates in grace.

2. The rest of the chapter is simply **detailed instruction** as to how these vows could be paid. We will not take time to read it – you can do so at your leisure.
  - Verses 9-13 list *certain animals* which could be given, both clean and unclean.
  - Verses 14-15 specify that *houses* could be dedicated to God in payment of a vow.
  - Verses 16-25 provide for the dedication of *land*, in connection with the year of jubilee, when all land had to return to its original owner, regardless of who was using it at the time, because God held absolute title to the entire land.
3. In Verses 26-34 **certain things were excluded** as payment of vows:
  - For instance, the firstlings of animals could not be used to pay a vow because God had said, “Every firstborn person or animal that opens the womb shall be mine,” {cf, Exod 13:2}. Therefore that could not be used to pay a vow because it already belonged to God.
  - Then there were devoted things which could not be used, Verse 28:

**“But no devoted thing that a man devotes to the LORD, or anything that he has, whether of man or beast, or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the LORD.” {Lev 27:28 RSV}**

In Israel it was possible to take a child or a servant or an animal and devote that person or animal for the entire span of his life to the service of God. Hannah did this with her son Samuel {1 Sam 1:1-28}. Even before he was born she promised him to God. And when her boy grew old enough she took him to the temple and gave him to God to be used in the service there. Samuel the prophet grew up in the temple as a devoted thing unto God.

This verse also helps to explain a puzzle in the book of Judges which many have wondered about. Remember the story of Jephthah, who made a rash vow. He went out to battle against the enemies of Israel and said to God, "If you'll give me victory, then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return I will offer as a burnt offering," {cf, Judg 11:30-31}. To his horror, his only child, his daughter, came out to meet him. His heart sank, for he knew that he would be called upon to fulfill that vow. He explained it to her and she very bravely said, "Well, father, if you've made a vow to God then you can't break it. And I am willing that you fulfill your vow. Only let me spend two months with my friends first," {cf, Judg 11:36-37}. The account tells us that she did spend the time with her friends, going up and down the mountains of Israel. At the end of that period, the account says, "she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow," {Judg 11:39 RSV}. Many have recoiled at that, understandably, and asked themselves, "Did he actually offer her as a living sacrifice, as a burnt offering on the altar?" Some have tried to escape the reality of that by saying that he paid redemption money for her. But you notice that Verse 28 of Leviticus 27 says, "No devoted thing ... shall be sold or redeemed." It must be given to God. My personal opinion is that Jephthah did offer his daughter as a burnt offering. His was a very foolish vow, one that he had no business making in the first place. This represented a time of moral decline in the nation of Israel. The whole period of the Judges was such. But this illustrates

the rigidity with which the law of vows was fulfilled within Israel and indicates how seriously they took the matter of devotion to God.

- Finally, Verses 29-33, no condemned person could be used to pay a vow, because he belonged to God already.
  - Nor could tithes be used to pay a vow, because they also belonged to the LORD already.
4. All the detail of this chapter, of course, is speaking to us. And we must ask the question, **What do vows mean to us?** What is the function of vows in our lives? For it is impossible not to make vows. Every time we deal with God we tend, in some sense, to make a vow or a promise. On one hand, the flesh within us wants to bargain with God. We have all felt this way. We have all wanted to say to God, whether we've actually said it or not, "Lord, I want this so badly. If you'll just do this for me, I'll do something for you." We tend to come to God on that legalistic, bargaining basis. And when we come on that basis God says, "All right, whatever you say. But remember, you are going to have to fulfill it!"

A few years ago a young man came up to me after a service. He was rather nervous and very disturbed, and he said, "I want to tell you a story." So I sat down with him and he told me, "Two years ago I was in Vietnam. Our company was pinned down under an enemy barrage. I was in an exposed position, bullets were whistling over my head, shrapnel was exploding all around me, and I was scared stiff. I was sure I would not get out of there alive. I prayed and cried out to God [the young man was already a Christian], 'Lord, I know what you want: you want me to enter the ministry. If you'll get me back safely, I'll go to school and start training for it.' And God answered that prayer and brought me back safely."

Then he said that the minute he got out of the Army he went into business and started making money. He put the vow in the back of his mind. "But," he said, "you know, an amazing thing has happened. At first I made lots of money. I was a success. I almost forgot this promise I had made, and I thought God had forgotten it. But strange



things have been happening recently. Despite the general success of my type of business, despite the favorable conditions for business, despite everything I can do, I've been gradually losing money. In very odd ways my business has been falling apart, and, just yesterday, I lost the whole thing. I know what God is saying to me. He has taken me at my word. He has taken my business away, and I know what I've got to do. I just wanted you to hear the story. I don't need any advice; I know what God wants me to do."

He enrolled in seminary the next day and today he is in the ministry. God holds us to that kind of legalistic bargaining.

But, on the other hand, if we come to God, and say, "Lord, you have done so tremendously much for me! My heart is so moved that I just want to promise you this, and this, out of my life. But I don't know how to pay it. I know that I won't be able to do that myself, and so I look to you, Lord, to help me fulfill it." That kind of promise God loves, and he will pick us up and make the performance of that vow richer and fuller than we could ever have dreamed, fulfilling it "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," {Eph 3:20 KJV}. You see, God uses our vows to stretch us, to bring us out.

Have you ever noticed how often our hymns reflect promises or vows we make as the people of God? Yesterday I was in Oakland listening to a talk by Dr. Charles Allen, pastor of the huge, 10,000-member First Methodist Church of Houston, Texas. He told of an experience he had recently, when he was conducting a morning worship service, and, right in the middle of singing a hymn, he broke into loud laughter. His wife rebuked him afterward. She said, "I was embarrassed that you would break out in laughter like that right in the middle of a song, for no reason at all." "Well," he said, "I couldn't help it. We were singing 'Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee,' and I noticed the words of the third verse: 'Take my silver and my gold, Not a mite would I withhold.' It suddenly struck me, with all the millionaires sitting in the congregation, what if God would answer that prayer right then? Some of them would be very upset and angry with him. I've been encouraging them to give their silver and gold for a long time, but they've not been willing. But now

they're singing, 'Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.'"

I often think, as we sing hymns, of Jesus' admonition that we will have to give an account for every idle word that we utter. We ought not to sing hymns without meaning what we say. I don't know if you watch me, but sometimes when we are singing a hymn and I see what the words are, I shut up! Because I'm not ready to say that yet, and I know that God is listening. Hymns are not just to fill in the time, nor to give you a chance to stand after you have been sitting awhile. They are a way of saying something to God.

So what are vows?

They are a way God has of drawing us along toward maturity and of claiming his rightful ownership of us.

If you read this passage through carefully you will see that in every case, whether it is persons or animals or houses or lands or whatever being pledged, ultimate title, absolute right, belongs to God. Ownership was vested in God. It is all his. We sing it sometimes in our offertory hymn:

We give Thee but Thine own,  
Whate'er the gift may be:  
All that we have is Thine alone,  
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

That is true. That is the meaning of the words carved in the wall behind this platform: "You are not your own; You are bought with a price," {cf, 1 Cor 6:19-20}. If you belong to God then you are already his. And vows and promises are ways he has of fulfilling that fact and leading us into its realization. Sometimes we make rash promises, as Jephthah did, and give God things that we wouldn't ordinarily, because we want something from him. And then he holds us to it, and leads us along. The young man I mentioned probably would never have gone to seminary if he had not made that vow in the heat of conflict in Vietnam. God used that vow to fulfill his purpose in that man's life.

God also uses the promises we make when our hearts are moved and stirred to thanksgiving. We offer ourselves to him and he takes us at our word and claims us and thus establishes his right in our life.

A woman said to me the other day, "I know I don't have too many years left (she had had cancer,

and an operation had given her a reprieve for awhile), but I promised the Lord that I would give the remaining years of my life to him in a way I never have before. I'll be available for whatever he wants me to do." God was using that vow to fulfill her life and to bring her along to the place where he could claim his rightful inheritance in her. This is the way God deals with us.

Last night I was listening to a talk by Howard Butt, Jr., an articulate layman from Corpus Christi, Texas. He said that God deals with so many people as if they were apples. He seems to take them like eating a whole apple with one bite. But he felt that he was more like an onion – God kept taking him layer by layer. I identify with that. I think that this is way God has dealt with me. And he uses these promises, these moment of intense gratitude, these feelings of deep devotion, when we offer God our lives. Remember the plaque that you sometimes see hanging on a wall:

Only one life  
T'will soon be past  
Only what's done  
For Christ will last.

God uses these promises to remind us of that fact. I like to change that last line and say, "Only what Christ does in me will last." Only that part of my life which I give back to him will I have throughout eternity. That which I keep for myself will never make it beyond the grave. But that which I give back to him, whatever it is, I will have throughout all the ages of eternity.

I'm tempted to close this service with a time of giving ourselves to God. And yet I'm not impressed with public demonstrations like that. I think God is not much impressed with them either, because we tend to think that was the moment we gave ourselves to him, and then we forget it. What impresses God is when we give ourselves to him in the daily course of events. The book of Leviticus is closing at exactly the point to which Paul brings us in Romans 12:

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, {cf, Rom 12:1-2a KJV}**

That is reasonable for you as a human – to present your body. And the word means "keep on presenting." The presentation God is impressed with is: perhaps this afternoon at home, when your children irritate you or your wife does something you don't like, or your husband is a grouch, and you are tempted to say something sharp and caustic but instead you stop and you yield yourself not as an instrument of unrighteousness unto sin but of righteousness unto God. Instead of saying something sharp and cutting you say something encouraging and helpful, something which changes the situation. "Soft words drive away wrath, but sharpness produces strife." That is the kind of presentation God is talking about.

In the closing pages of the book we are brought face to face with those moments when we want to say to God, "Lord, here is my life. Here I am; I give it to you. And here are my children; I give them to you. My friendships – whatever – Lord, here they are. I want you to have them, to possess them. And even though I struggle with you, please take them anyway, and help me to fulfill my promises to you in the day to day, moment by moment living of my life." In such a moment you can simply stand quietly before God and say whatever you want to say to him about your life. He already owns it! What a joy it is to take that which is his inheritance in the saints – your life and mine – and return it to him and say, "Lord here is your inheritance: claim it for yourself." You can read again those verses from Romans 12 while you say to him whatever he lays upon your heart:

**I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good, and acceptable, and perfect. {Rom 12:1-2 RSV}**

#### **Prayer:**

Our Father, we don't want to come to you like Jacob, bargaining with you, or like Jephthah, making rash promises we cannot fulfill or that would hurt ourselves or someone else terribly if we did fulfill them.

Promises, Promises, Promises

We want to come trusting your love and grace, Father, returning to you what is rightfully yours. Keep us from robbing you, Lord Jesus, of your rightful inheri-

tance. Help us give back to you that which properly belongs to you – all that we are, our very lives. We do it in your name. Amen.

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