

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 worldling 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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