

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 requirement 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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