

The Beauty of Holiness

Israel's Sacrificial System & the Christian Faith

David Gooding

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Revised Version (1885), the *King James Version*, or are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases.

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Introduction

The Beauty of Holiness

In these sessions we are to think together about the sacrifices described in the early chapters of the book of Leviticus. We shall spend tonight on a very elementary introduction to that theme. In coming evenings, we shall consider the five sacrifices detailed in those chapters. That done, we shall spend our final evenings dealing with three of the laws of those offerings. The offerings, as we know, were addressed to the people and told the people what they had to bring to God. The laws of the offerings were addressed to the priests and taught those priests the demands and responsibilities of their duties.

Let us begin our introduction by reading four passages from Scripture. The first of them is from Leviticus, and I read from the English Revised Version.

And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tent of meeting, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When any man of you offereth an oblation unto the LORD, ye shall offer your oblation of the cattle, *even* of the herd and of the flock. (1:1-2)

And 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 came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people. And there came forth fire from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: and when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces. (9:22-24)

And then, so that we may gauge a little of the emotional experience it was for people of that time to worship the Lord at this ancient shrine, let us read some verses from Psalm 27.

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evil-doers came upon me to eat up my flesh, *even* mine adversaries and my foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, even then will I be confident. One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple. For in the day of trouble he shall keep me secretly in his pavilion: in the covert of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall lift me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; and I will offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD. (vv. 1-6)

And finally a few well known verses from the New Testament that will help us to keep on the right lines as we try to expound and understand these ancient sacrifices.

And every priest indeed standeth day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, the which can never take away sins: but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. And the Holy Ghost also beareth witness to us: for after he hath said, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws on their heart, and upon their mind also will I write them; *then saith he*, And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. (Heb 10:11–18)

And may God give us good understanding of his Word.

Why study Leviticus?

So then, we are to embark upon a study of the ancient sacrifices of the nation of Israel from the early chapters of Leviticus. I suppose it is a not-very-well-kept secret that the book of Leviticus is not every Christian's favourite book in the Bible! Were those who are to inhabit a desert island forced to choose one book out of all the books in the Bible to accompany them, I fancy that those who voted for Leviticus would be few indeed.

The book is full of curious and ancient things. The early chapters are full of offerings and, worse than that, full of the insides of animals—livers and hearts and entrails and dirty feet and other such things, which are not everybody's most engaging reading. Then when you read a little bit further you come across food laws. What ugly beasties you are not to eat and what animals you may eat. All obviously very necessary, but not altogether attractive at first sight. If you have persevered that far, as doubtless many of you have, then presently you come across other laws about all sorts of unmentionable diseases and fluxes and fluids and emissions and horrible things that can happen to the human body—until some people feel that Leviticus is a book that has to be taken, if at all, in small doses.

It could possibly be in your mind therefore to wonder why we should study Leviticus. What are we to make of all these things that to us, in these distant times, might perhaps feel a little grotesque?

The first answer is because they are in the inspired word of God. And when we talk of the inspiration of holy Scripture, we're not talking of some purple passages that, when we read them, move our hearts to their very foundations with tremendous surges of emotion and of praise. There are such passages in holy writ, no doubt. They are not any more inspired than the book of Leviticus is inspired, for both are God-breathed and every Scripture, says the New Testament, is God-breathed and is profitable. And if it should be that we find the study of Leviticus a trifle more difficult than we find the study of Psalm 23, then let us come at it as a tribute to our faith in the inspiration of God—persuaded in our hearts that God would never have caused it to be written were it not for our good and our profit.

But there is another reason why we should study these ancient sacrifices. *The New Testament tells us that they were prefigurements—pictures in advance—to help us understand the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord.* The New Testament tells us that Christ died for our sins. That is glorious, but that isn't the end of the story. The gospel is not only that Christ died for our sins, but that he died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*. Those last few words are exceedingly important. They tell us that the death of Jesus Christ was no horrific accident. He died according to the Scriptures—according to 'the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God' (Acts 2:23). Thank God that Jesus Christ died according to the Scriptures. When Christ died for you, my brother, my sister, it was no accident. It was not a case of God making the best of a bad job, trying to salvage something out of the wreck of Calvary. Our blessed Lord, though crucified by the hands of lawless men, died according to the Scriptures, as Scripture said he would; and when the hour was come—precisely upon the hour as Scripture had said—he came and he died, and he died for you.

But those words tell us something more. Not merely that Jesus Christ's death was prepared of old and prophesied in Old Testament Scripture, it is telling us the significance of that death. In the Old Testament, and especially in this book of Leviticus, God has given us patterns that help us to perceive what it means when it says 'Christ died for our sins'. In ancient Israel when a man sinned, according to God's holy law he had to come before God with his sacrifice, confess his sin before God, lay his hands upon the head of that animal and then solemnly, in the presence of God, kill that beast so that the lamb, or the bullock or whatever it was, was publicly seen to die for his sins.

God in his kindness had it done millions of times through hundreds of years, so that we in our day might see now what the New Testament means when it says that Christ died for our sins. It wasn't merely that in dying he gave us a good example and showed us how to resist the temptations of sin and resisted them to death. It wasn't merely that he gave us an example of how we should stand valiantly for God's truth even though it should cost us our lives. It is all that but, thank God, it is more. The Old Testament has prepared our minds, if we've read it, to see that he died for our sins. We have sinned, deserved the penalty of God's holy law and as we come in faith and lay our hands, so to speak, upon the head of Jesus Christ, our great sacrifice for sin, and we see him die at Calvary, then we are to know that just as the animals died for the Israelite, so Christ died for our sins—for my sins, that I may go free.

That's why we study Leviticus. Difficult as some of the imagery may be for us in our modern world, we study it because of all the wealth it has to tell us about something that lies close to our heart as believers. For what is there more blessed or more dear to any one of us than that 'the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20). If even a remote book like Leviticus can help me see a little bit more of what it meant when he loved me and gave himself for me, then we shall labour at trying to understand it. And because those Old Testament sacrifices were prefigurements of our Lord, we shall find the New Testament talking of the death of our Lord in phrases that it borrows from the Old Testament. Says John the Baptist, as he points to the Saviour, 'Behold the Lamb of God,' choosing his term deliberately in contradistinction to those thousands upon millions of lambs that died in the

Old Testament as a token payment for sin. Now, says John, 'Here is The Lamb, the ideal, the true Lamb of God, come to take away the sin of the world' (see John 1:29).

And then you will see the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7, speaking like this to his fellow Christians: 'Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us.' He is talking of the death of the Lord Jesus, but using an image from the Old Testament—a metaphor, a type, a picture, a symbol, to help us understand. Just as that sacrifice was slain at Passover time and its blood put upon the doorpost so that all who sheltered behind that blood-sprinkled door were saved from the wrath of the angel of God's vengeance, so Christ has died for us to provide for us the security and refuge from the angel of God's wrath and judgment. All who shelter behind that blood-sprinkled door, behind Jesus Christ the great Passover lamb, are safe and secure forever.

When Paul is talking to different believers in Ephesians 5:2, he says that we ought to love one another like the Lord Jesus loved us 'and gave himself for us an offering of a sweet smell, acceptable to God.' He is using the technical language of the Old Testament. For in those Old Testament sacrifices there were some sacrifices that were put upon the altar and, when the fire began to burn them, the smell of it went up, so to speak, towards heaven; and the Old Testament, using its simple and direct language, says that God smelled 'a smell of rest'. Of course everybody knew it was only picturesque language. The Israelites in those ancient times didn't imagine that God somehow sat upon a throne in heaven and when he smelled the gravy, he said, 'That smells nice.' No, it was only a symbol, but a symbol of this kind of gratification and pleasure and rest and enjoyment.

What a lovely figure it is, and we must always remember it as we draw near to the dark shades of Calvary. As we see the clouds gather around Calvary and the darkness descend, we are to understand that in those terrible moments when God must forsake his Son, there was something hideous done, something indescribably terrible: Christ was made sin for us. All the fearful, dark, evil sin of the world was laid upon him. Yet in that moment there came up to God such an aroma of delight and glory and satisfaction. How will you reconcile such opposites? I'll tell you how it was. In a world where for centuries, ever since man was, there had never been anyone fully to do God's will, at last God found somebody who was prepared to do God's will, even though it cost him such a hideous death, the death of the cross. There came up to God from Calvary, as Christ bore your sin and mine, quite apart from the benefit we got out of it, something that delighted God's heart and will never cease to delight God's heart forever.

Of course we're not surprised when, in another passage, we hear Paul say those words that put the other side of the story. Not only was Christ's death 'an offering of a sweet smell acceptable to God' but 2 Corinthians 5:21 will tell us that 'he was made sin for us'—or you could translate it—'was made a sin offering for us. He who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.'

So here is our second big reason for studying these ancient sacrifices—that they pre-figure for us the sacrifice of Christ and provide thought forms, ways of thinking, mental images and pictures that we can use to grasp the meaning of his death more clearly, so that not only should our minds be informed, but our imaginations enriched and therefore our hearts reached the more profoundly.

A sacrifice accepted

So let us pause a moment just to take one little advantage of this ancient book of Leviticus. Did you notice that descriptive passage we read where, on the first occasion, the offerings having been ordained and the priesthood prepared, there came that public occasion when now the priest and the people gathered and they brought their sacrifices. The priest brought his sacrifices for he too was a sinful man, and Israel the nation brought theirs, and they did with them appropriately as they had been told. Then, as each sacrifice had been offered, finally they came to the burnt offering and the fat upon the altar. The priests lifted up their hand to bless the people and then Aaron and Moses went in to meet God and came out again to bless the people. And in that moment, says Leviticus, 'The glory of the Lord appeared and, the very fire of God came out and burnt that burnt offering and consumed it to ashes upon the altar' (Lev 9:23–24).

When the people saw it they shouted in automatic reaction of wonder. Wonder beyond explanation—to see the very glory of God come and the fire of God come and, before their very eyes, accept their sacrifice, so to speak. What a thing to have brought a sacrifice, but now to be made conscious that the living God was there, and the living God had actually accepted your sacrifice, what a thing it was! The people shouted as the reality of it gripped their hearts, and in that split second they fell upon their faces.

Those days have long since gone by. We do not now think in terms of literal fire, not even miraculous fire, coming down from heaven. But it is given to God's people to know a far more wonderful thing. To stand in spirit, in memory, in heart, by the great sacrifice of Christ until God's Holy Spirit makes it as vivid to you as he could possibly make it. God, the living God, has accepted that sacrifice on your behalf. What a wonder it is when our blessed Lord, in his redeeming office and by his sacrifice, brings us in touch with the living God and you know his reality and you know that Christ's sacrifice has been accepted for you. What shouts of triumph, even if nobody else hears them, come up from our hearts and how, without any ostentation or pretence, we fall upon our faces in adoring worship.

Offerings of approach

But perhaps by this time, you have a second question bubbling up in your minds. 'That's very good, Mr Preacher, but what in particular have these sacrifices in the beginning of Leviticus got to say to us? At least, what have they anything more to say than, for instance, that Passover lamb that you mentioned earlier? I understand the Passover lamb and I don't merely understand it as a bit of history. I understand its modern spiritual meaning. I too woke up to the fact that I was exposed to the wrath of God. I too saw the point—and the illustration helped me—that Christ had died as my Passover lamb and I could shelter behind him. I too have the assurance that the destroying angel of God will never reach me, nor find me, not to the remotest bound of eternity. I am safe, sheltered beneath that blood. Why do I need any more? What more could there possibly be for me in these sacrifices?'

The short answer is that these sacrifices at the beginning of Leviticus are what we call offerings of approach. That is to say, they weren't the offerings by which Israel escaped the wrath of God in Egypt and were delivered from bondage to Pharaoh. These were sacrifices

that the Israelites made as they responded to God's call to come near to him in his dwelling place. As they approached him, God instructed them to bring these offerings. It is on that aspect of them that we shall concentrate in these weeks. So allow me now, in some detail, to try and express their function as I see it.

For that, I ask you to notice exactly how Leviticus begins. 'The LORD called unto Moses'. He not merely said unto Moses, he *called* unto Moses. This was a divine summons. God summoning his people, and notice where from. 'And he called to Moses, and spoke to him out of the tent of meeting'. It is interesting that in the first three books of the Bible, you will hear God speak very early on, and call very early on.

God calling

In the book of Genesis, we read that God called unto Adam, 'Where are you, Adam?' (3:9). God called to Adam in the garden of Eden, as Adam was busy trying to hide himself behind the wonders of creation and hide himself from creation's Lord. Calling to a man guilty, fallen, now running away from God, trying to hide behind creation. And the call of the merciful Creator, urging Adam to come and stand before God and let his sin be exposed; to stop running away and find the beginnings of the way back to God.

The book of Exodus, in chapter 3, represents God calling again. This time, how different the scene is. No longer the luscious trees of the beautiful garden of Eden with all their greenery and fruit and delight. Sin has had some centuries to get working and now when God calls, he calls out of the midst of a thorn bush, burning with fire. What things sin can do: it has transformed our world from a garden of Eden to a weary old desert full of thorn bushes whose end is to be cursed. Moses had fled from all the complicated politics of Egypt, where both the oppressed and the oppressor were found to be unreasonable men. He fled away from it all into a desert, solitary and cursed, and there he heard God calling out of life's thorn bushes. A God who had not forsaken his people. A God who had come down to stand with his people. A God in the very thorn bush, which explained why it burned but was not consumed.

Give history some more centuries to wreak worse havoc, you will find at last a figure on a cross, crowned with twisted thorns. That's the kind of thing sin does. Yet from that figure crowned with thorns, God calls yet to men and women whose lives deserve the curse and tells of somebody who's been made a curse for them, and how the tangled thorns can be undone and woven into a veritable crown of glory.

God calling from the tabernacle

But history moves on and now this time God calls in our book of Leviticus, not from the splendour of nature in the garden of Eden, nor from the wonder of the thorn bush, burning with fire but not consumed; He calls now from something more glorious: from the tent of meeting, the tabernacle. Glorious indeed; but not now with the glory of nature, but by the glory of art and grace and redemption. Its gold and its silver and its purple and its cherubim; all beautiful indeed. I say again, not the beauty of nature anymore. The beauty of art put to use by redemption. This is God's home and he's calling his people to come near.

This is the goal of redemption, isn't it? You will remember the story in the book of Exodus, how that when God redeemed his people and they were free now from the wrath of the avenging angel, he brought them across the desert until they came to Mount Sinai. There God called a halt and, wonder of wonders, we are told that God came down and stood upon Mount Sinai. Pause a moment to perceive how wonderful that is. For the ancient Israelites who record this story were not some primitive animists, inclined to see spirits in trees and rivers and mountains and anything else. No, Israel were monotheists who believed in a God who created the whole world. Israel at that time didn't indulge in our modern terminology of space and time, but they did believe in a God who existed before creation was. A God who created all things. What we would call, in our language, the Creator, the Lord transcendent above all space and time. Space and time are but his creatures. Wonder of wonders that when he got this redeemed people out as far as Sinai, the transcendent Lord came into time and into space. When it happened, creation rocked on its heels and Mount Sinai could scarce endure it and was all on fire with the glory of God. What a thing it was, and when the people saw it they were so exceedingly afraid that they pleaded with Moses to allow them to stand back and that only Moses should go to meet God.

God coming near

Such was the awesomeness when a God who is completely other, comes from his domain into ours. He came to tell them the whole purpose why he had redeemed them. 'You see how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself' (Exod 19:4). That is what redemption is about. It wasn't primarily about getting Israel to Canaan, though that was involved. Even in those far-off days, redemption was more than that. Redemption was so that the people could come and meet God, their Creator. The trumpet blew and Moses had to go, whether he wanted to or not, up into the mountain. Said God to the Israelites, 'Now I've redeemed you, I make you a proposal. If you'll keep my covenant, then you shall be a treasure to me. I propose in fact that you shall be a kingdom of priests, to serve me, to fellowship with me.' And the people said 'yes'. Then God did an even greater marvel. The transcendent Lord—all the vast universes in space are not big enough to contain him—volunteered to come and presence himself in that tabernacle, so that his people could come near and know him and discover at close quarters what God was like. The awesomeness of his holiness, and yet they could come unafraid and see the beauty of his holiness.

What a marvel God is. He's done the same for us, you know. Not waiting until we get home at last to heaven—though even there for us to be in heaven is a condescension for God—he is prepared to come down here, has come down in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord, making himself such that men might come and retain their awe of him, yet be unafraid, and come near enough to see his beauty. I know they had no concepts like you have. Blessed are your eyes for they see what prophets and kings longed to see and never saw. But even in those far-off days, something of the beauty of God got through to them. Did you recognise those lovely words from Psalm 27? Written by a man who knew life's troubles—enemies galore on every side, threatening to eat his very flesh—and he comforts himself with this, 'Through life, through thick and thin, through good and ill, this I have

made my one ambition in life—that I might dwell in the house of the Lord, and behold the beauty of the Lord.’

Some of you would spend a whole holiday’s money to go to Naples or Florence, that you might see the masterpieces of beauty that men have contrived in this world, and why shouldn’t you go? Oh, my friend, the God who made beauty, who is beauty, has not only redeemed us, but he invites us to come near that we might see the beauty of his holiness. If you respond to his invitation, it will wile away many an otherwise dreary day, many a difficult patch in life. In business, in politics, even in the home, when difficulties come and life all seems tangled and at cross purposes, there is an escape, my brother, my sister. Not from reality, oh thank God, *into* reality. Into that reality which in the last analysis is the whole reason why we were made. Little bits of human clay given eternal life by God, that we might be able to come and see the beauty of God and enjoy our Creator, who has become Father and redeemer. That’s what life is about: that is reality.

Acceptable gifts

As they came to draw near to God, they were to be allowed to bring their gifts. That was an awesome privilege, but what gifts should they bring? And therefore God in his mercy supplied them with a high priest who could tell them, as they came, what things the Lord would find acceptable. I guarantee that if you had it in your heart one of these days to give the Queen a gift, you might scratch your head a little bit. What could you possibly get that the Queen would find acceptable; and whether Woolworths would have it, or Marks and Spencer. She’s a little bit difficult to please, for the simple reason that she, as they say, has everything.

To be allowed to bring gifts to almighty God who has everything—what do I bring? They were humble gifts that God allowed his people to bring. Even then they needed a priest to help them. Imagine old Zedekiah, a clodhopper from Galilee, coming down with a pig under his arm. He meant it well, and a horrified priest grabs him just as he’s about to come into the gate of the tabernacle, and says:

‘Wait a minute, you can’t come in here with that.’

‘What’s wrong with it: it’s a beautiful pig?’

‘Well, so it might be, and your intention was very good, but I’m afraid God doesn’t like pigs. Not as gifts.’

‘Oh, but my Gentile neighbours—’

‘I know, Athenians and everybody else bring pigs, I know; but God doesn’t like pigs.’

Have you ever felt that difficulty, coming to worship the Lord and bringing your gifts—what shall you say or what shall you do? Where will you begin and where will you stop? Oh, thank God, he’s given us a great high priest. If you find worship difficult and you don’t know what to say, come to your high priest, my dear brother, my sister, and tell him you find this too big a thing to do and please will he help you. That’s what he’s for.

Acceptable givers

As they came to God to bring their gifts, they discovered another thing. It wasn't enough to bring beautiful gifts. If the gifts were going to be acceptable, they had to be beautiful people that brought them. So when the high priest went in with his gift of incense, for instance, he didn't just go off in his garden corduroys, with mud on his boots. I should think not. If you were going ahead with your scheme to give Her Majesty a gift—suppose even you were chosen to be Bangor's representative, to bring the gift to the Queen—you wouldn't go in your corduroys either. You would say, 'If Her Majesty is going to find this acceptable, it's not only the gift that's got to be beautiful, but I've got to be as beautiful as I can be.' I guarantee the ladies would have little difficulty. It's us menfolk that find it difficult. How do you look beautiful enough?

In those far-off days, the priest when he went in was clothed with the most delightful garments of colour and beauty and glory and dignity. He was going in to meet uncreated beauty. Oh what drab, colourless people we can be sometimes. When God invites us to come to fellowship with uncreated beauty, he wants us to be beautiful people as well. That's why this book of Leviticus at first seems odd. It's a book about making people beautiful. Or, if you like, a book about making people holy; but then holiness is beautiful. The beauty of holiness, as the psalmist put it. No dirt of course: that's fundamental. No literal filth, no moral filth, no spiritual filth, of course not. No dirty appetites, no eating unclean food. Ah, more than that: no abnormalities.

A lot of chapters in Leviticus are given over to rules and regulations that say, 'Now look here, if you have something abnormal about you, that must be put right if it can.' We find it a little difficult reading sometimes, when we read that people with a hunchback were not allowed into the presence of God as priests. You say that's unfair, they couldn't help it. Isn't God being unkind? Does he discriminate against people if they have some physical abnormality? No, not really, but in those far-off days—take comfort in it, my brother—God was teaching that nothing but perfect beauty is acceptable to him. I'm glad God took that stand, and the older I get, the more glad I am. For as I feel the old spondylitis and a bit of arthritis and all the rest of it begin to twist me out of shape, I say, 'Thank God, he is against that, and one of these days, I'm going to have a beautiful body.'

But then of course, God is concerned not only with beautiful bodies: he's concerned about abnormalities in our personalities. When we read those ancient directions about physical abnormalities, we turn perhaps the more easily to think about our psychological personality abnormalities. As we draw near to God and we begin to see the wonder of his holiness, his awesomeness, the beauty of it, one thing I guarantee will happen eventually: we shall become the more painfully aware of our un-holiness, our maladjustment, our abnormalities. Then it will come home to us the wonder of what Leviticus is saying, what it said to those ancient people and what it now says to us through its New Testament interpretation.

As we come as God's people to bring our gifts of worship and praise to God and have fellowship with him, and are made aware in those holy moments of our inadequacies, our twistedness, our abnormalities, thank God that he has a sacrifice for us that can cover our need and make us, broken men and women that we are, acceptable, accepted with God. So

that we may come even now, not wait until we get home to heaven, and approach the very presence of God and worship the Lord, and know ourselves accepted for his sake.

A heavenly tabernacle

We shall find another thing as we think about these sacrifices. They will remind us of our privilege of drawing near, not merely to some earthly tabernacle, but to the heavenly tabernacle, the presence of God in heaven. It will remind us of our privilege to come and behold the beauty of the Lord and to come and bring our offerings of thanksgiving and praise and worship. As we discover our inadequacies, our Lord will point us to the sacrifice of Christ, offered not continually, but once and for all on behalf of us, God's people. Not merely to deliver us from the wrath of God in the past, but to make it possible for us in all our failings to come near to God and worship him now. It will do more, and with this final point I leave you for this study.

The perfect sacrifice

When God's ancient people brought their sacrifices of one kind and another to the Lord, to cover for their shortcomings, their sins, their abnormalities, their impurities, their trespasses, then God very frequently made them cut the animal into pieces and offer the sundry pieces in order. You say, 'Why did he do that?' Well there were practical reasons, of course. If you try to burn a whole bullock all at once, you'll find it very difficult if you do it solid; easier to do it if you cut it up. But they cut them up also so that they could see that there was no imperfection, no blemish inside that animal.

To be acceptable, even as a token sacrifice—and that's all it was, only a symbol—but to be acceptable to God as a token and a symbol, the animal had to be as perfect as it could be. As we think of that, it will speak to us of our Lord. Not merely that he died for us, but that he had to be perfect in order to die for us. When God has made us at home in his presence on the basis that Christ died for us to cover our inadequacy, then God's spirit will say, 'Pause a minute. Will you not look at Christ now? How did it come that he was fit to die for you?' And you say, 'Lord, I begin to see it now:

Where I have been so abnormal, he was perfect.

Where I have been so sinful and tainted, he was pure and sinless.

Where my devotion has been so inadequate, his devotion all his life was perfect.'

It was because he was a master of living that he could be a sacrifice in his dying. As he points us to that lovely life that was given for us, God will say to the likes of you and me, 'Have you seen anything more beautiful than that? You who have found it so difficult to live as you should, consider him for a moment and watch that master of living.' How extraordinarily beautiful, and God's Holy Spirit will seek, by any image he can use, by any metaphor, by any picture, to engage our hearts with the Lord Jesus. Until presently, we begin to forget how horrible we are, and instead of being obsessed with our own shortcomings until they weigh us down and drive us to despair, our minds and hearts get taken up with Christ and we

begin to admire him. And then we turn to worshipping him and, before we know where we are, we find a desire growing within us. We want to be like him. Isn't that how you find it? Yes, here is one of holiness's secrets: that you become like what you worship, and as a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov 23:7).

As we come to consider these ancient sacrifices and the pictures of Christ they present, far from being impractical or unrelated, we shall find them now and again probing some maladjustment, some abnormalities and sore spots in our own personalities. We shall find more. We shall find welcome with God and acceptance with God on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. We shall find even more. We shall find that in Christ, God has given us some glorious, beautiful savour to fill our hearts, so that thinking about him and worshipping him, we may become like him. May the Lord deign to use these humble studies to that glorious end, for his name's sake.

Obedience unto Death

Let's read from Leviticus 1, and I read again from the English revised version.

And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tent of meeting, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When any man of you offereth an oblation unto the LORD, you shall offer your oblation of the cattle, *even* of the herd and of the flock. If his oblation be a burnt offering of the herd, he shall offer it a male without blemish: he shall offer it at the door of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. (vv. 1-4)

Perhaps we should interrupt our reading to notice that phrase. It is important and sometimes overlooked: it is true of this offering as of others. It was offered to *make atonement for the offerer*. Indeed, it was the chief sacrifice to pay the ransom price of sin. Whereas in subsequent studies when we shall come across a sin offering, we shall find there it has to do with the purification of sin; this has to do with the ransom price of sin. That is sometimes forgotten when people study this first sacrifice, so let us pay special attention to the phrase 'this burnt offering was offered to make atonement for the offerer'.

And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD: and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall present the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is at the door of the tent of meeting. And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into its pieces. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, 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 which is upon the altar: but its inwards and its legs shall he wash with water: and the priest shall burn the whole on the altar, for a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. And if his oblation be of the flock, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt offering; he shall offer it a male without blemish. And he shall kill it on the side of the altar, northward, before the LORD: and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle its blood upon the altar round about. And he shall cut it into its pieces, with its head and its fat: and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar: but the inwards and the legs shall he wash with water: and the priest shall offer the whole, and burn it upon the altar: it is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. And if his oblation to the LORD be a burnt offering of fowls, then he shall offer his oblation of turtledoves, or of young pigeons. And the priest shall bring it unto the altar, and wring off its head, and burn it upon the altar; and the blood thereof shall be drained out on

the side of the altar: and he shall take away its crop with the filth thereof, and cast it beside the altar on the east part, in the place of the ashes: and he shall rend it by the wings thereof, *but* shall not divide it asunder: and the priest shall burn it upon the altar, upon the wood that is upon the fire: it is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. (vv. 5–17)

May the Lord give us good understanding of his holy word.

On Tuesday night, when we introduced ourselves to this study, we noticed that the offerings that are described here in the early chapters of Leviticus were offerings used by Israel in their approach to God. For Israel, redeemed out of Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb, were subsequently invited by God to become a kingdom of priests and to minister to God's pleasure and satisfaction, as God himself came down and dwelt among them in the ancient tabernacle. So these offerings were used in that delightful occupation, as God Almighty came down and displayed before his people the wonder of his holiness, the awesomeness of that holiness and the beauty of that holiness, and invited his people to come near and to enjoy him and enjoy his fellowship.

As they came to enjoy the fellowship of God, their redeemer, they would feel it right and proper that they should not come empty handed, but come bringing their gifts—sacrifices that might be pleasurable to God. We saw likewise that as they came to have fellowship with God like that and began to perceive something of the unimaginable holiness of God, then they by contrast would feel smitten in their conscience. The nearer they came to God and all the glory and the beauty of his holiness, the more they would feel in themselves inadequate and abnormal and unclean and tainted, and would feel the need not merely to bring God gifts, but feel special need for some sacrifice that might cover their abysmal need, even as the redeemed people of God: sacrifices to cover their shortcomings and their abnormalities and unworthiness.

And so it is that we as Christians begin to see all kinds of parallels between that ancient institution of sacrifice and what our blessed Lord Jesus Christ has done and is doing for us. For like Israel, being redeemed, we are invited to approach God, not now in some earthly little tabernacle on the desert sand of Sinai; we are given grace and invitation to come into the very holiest of that true tabernacle that the Lord, not men, has pitched. And the wonder is that every believer cleansed by the blood of Christ, his body bathed with pure water of regeneration and with a high priest over the house of God, may rise in spirit and enter the very holiest of all in the presence of God. It is a fantastic wonder.

God forbid that we should ever become over-familiar with the opportunity that God gives us in that great privilege. And as we come, and God by his Holy Spirit begins to show us something of his holiness, something of its awesomeness, something of its beauty, we shall find our hearts, so to speak, cut in two. Part of us will respond eagerly to see the glory of the Lord and we shall say, like the psalmist, 'One thing have I desired, that I might dwell in the house of the Lord to gaze on the beauty of the Lord' (Ps 27:4). And our hearts will think forward to that glorious time when, free from all limitation and sin and defilement, we shall be able to go home and to achieve the whole object for which we were created—to be

able to gaze without intermediary upon the very face of God. Now we see in a glass darkly but, my brothers, my sisters, what will it be when at last we see him face-to-face?

Yet as our hearts respond eagerly, the other side of us will surely feel ashamed and inadequate. The more we perceive God's holiness, the more we shall realise how unholy we are—how twisted, what abnormalities there are about us, how unclean. We too shall feel a need for a sacrifice to cover our inadequacies. Not merely now because we are afraid of the wrath of God—indeed in spite of the fact that we know that Christ's sacrifice has removed the penalty of sin from us forever and there is no penalty—yet to come and dwell amongst the everlasting burnings of the holiness of God will make us feel ashamed. We shall find a need of a sacrifice that will cover our need as believers who still fall short of the glory of God.

An infinite sacrifice

As we so come, and as we so feel, God will point us to our blessed Lord. Not that we have to keep on offering his offering. Thank God, he has offered it once and for all. My brother, my sister, there is infinitely more in that sacrifice of Christ than ever we thought of the first day we came as sinners to the Saviour. Then we rejoiced in the fact that his sacrifice took away the penalty of sin. That was glorious and remains true. As life goes on, we shall see there was more in his sacrifice than that. Enough to cover all our need, not only as sinners but as saints, and not only as saints but as servants of God.

Then we noticed that not only will the Lord point us to the sacrifice of Christ that thus enables us to come into the presence of God without fear but, as we do that, the Holy Spirit will begin to point us to another thing: to the beauty of the life of the Lord Jesus that qualified him to die as a sacrifice for our sins. For a moment's thought will remind us that in order to be able to act as a sacrifice for us, our Lord had to be perfectly qualified in his life.

A perfect life

So another thing will happen. As we come to God and we begin to worship him, we sense how far we come short of his divine perfection and we turn once more, eagerly, to the great sacrifice of Christ that covers us in the presence of God. Then we shall begin to think again of how perfect Christ must have been when he lived here, in order to become a sacrifice. And by very contrast with our shortcomings, our admiration of the Lord Jesus will increase.

When you've been struggling at the piano, doing your level best; and two fingers at once have been difficult enough and you've been trying to work in a third, three fingers at once, and you're feeling almost like an expert, until you come to a dead halt. Then the real expert comes and says, 'Shall I play it for you?' Now, because you tried it yourself and came all unstuck and the notes have jarred and you've got it all jumbled, when the expert sits down and plays it for you, now you see what you wouldn't have seen if you hadn't tried yourself. You know the difficulty of playing that confoundedly complicated bit of Tchaikovsky but the expert does it and makes it look so easy, and you admire it, don't you? And when we've done our best to live as we should to the praise of God, and got it all wrong and muddled

up and bungled, the Lord points us to the Lord Jesus, and we see what we wouldn't have seen without life's experience.

What a past master at living he was, and because we know the difficulty, the more our hearts are filled with admiration of the Saviour. Little by little, perhaps without our knowing it, our hearts are carried away with admiration of him, and the Holy Spirit is doing his job and beginning to change us into the likeness of the Saviour. So let's take then this first offering now and see what it shall tell us about the Lord Jesus.

Physical organs that speak of emotional or psychological states

But, perhaps as we do so, I'd better answer one more possible objection to the use of these sacrifices as pictures of the Lord Jesus. I suspect most of you at any rate will readily agree with me that in some general way we may expect these sacrifices to picture the Lord Jesus. But you're hoping in your heart of hearts, maybe, that the preacher doesn't go too far. 'I hope he doesn't start taking cauls and livers and kidneys and things, saying there's some particular significance in them, because isn't that taking things a bit too far? Isn't it a little bit grotesque to think that an odd kidney here or a caul there and a liver somewhere else could ever illustrate anything about the Lord Jesus?'

I know how you think and I shall seek to respect your feelings as much as I can and restrain my imagination as I ought. But just one thing we should remember that may help us in our study and our uses of these pictures, and that is this: unlike ourselves, when the ancient Israelites came to describe psychological states, states of mind and heart and emotion within the human being, they often used, not scientific terms like we do, but simple, humble little terms, physical terms of the body in fact. They used physical bodily terms to speak about psychological and emotional phenomena. You've noticed that in your reading of the New Testament, and we shan't call the New Testament fanciful!

Paul says in Ephesians 1:17-18, 'I pray to the Father that he might give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, the eyes of your . . . ' and if you've got a modern translation it probably says, 'the eyes of your mind,' or something about 'your understanding being illuminated'—whereas the Greek says, 'the eyes of your heart'. Because when the ancient Israelites thought of that deep understanding that goes deeper than mere logic or IQ, that profound understanding that involves the whole man, then they thought of a man understanding with his heart, not just with his head. When the apostle prays about, 'the eyes of your heart', he isn't beginning to think that if you could only see your heart inside your chest, you'd see some eyes in it. It has become a metaphor—a psychological idea based on a physical term.

Likewise, if you remember how Paul talks in Philippians 1:8, where he is assuring his fellow believers in Philippi how much he feels for them, he says, 'I would like you to know how much I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ' (KJV). You refined folks in Bangor don't talk like that nowadays: you'd say something like, 'how I have a deep affection for you.' The ancient Hebrew spoke in a very simple and direct way. When he wanted to indicate that tender, almost emotional, but tender-hearted love and affection that makes us moved for somebody—glad at their joy, disturbed and moved at their sorrow and

pain—they called it their ‘bowels’. And if one might hazard a guess why they did so, I think it was just this, that if you really get moved in sympathy for folks, you’ll feel sometimes a kind of sympathetic nervous reaction down in the lower quarters of the body. So that’s why the Hebrews talked of tender sympathy and love under the term of the ‘bowels’.

What about kidneys? There is a famous verse in Revelation 2:23, where the Lord himself says, ‘And you shall know that I am the Lord that searches the kidneys.’ Might I ask if he’s searched your kidneys recently? You say, ‘What’s the Lord interested in my kidneys for?’ Well, not literal kidneys, of course not, but then, just as the ancients realised that in the human frame or in the animal body there are deep-seated organs working mysteriously and purging out all the tainted things and keeping the body pure and healthy and holy, so they thought of our psychological mechanism; that deep within us there are all sorts of profound motives going on. And in those dark recesses, where our deepest motives run that control our actions and our outlook, ‘I, the Lord, search those deep motivations of the heart.’ Those profound thoughts, those things that we don’t normally tell anybody else: our ambitions and our envies and our machinations. The modern translations have got over that for you and they say something like, ‘I, the Lord, search the heart’ or, ‘the mind’. If you’ve got an Authorised Version it says, ‘I, the Lord, search the reins’, which is a very polite English word based on an even politer Latin word, which simply means ‘kidneys’.

You will remember that Matthew 20 records a parable that our Lord spoke about the workmen who were hired at different times in the day, and when they came to receive their wages at the end of the day, those that had worked only an hour got a full penny. And then came those that had worked all twelve hours and they thought they were going to get twelve times as much, but they only got a penny and they were sorely upset. Said the Lord of the vineyard, ‘But you have no reason to get upset, gentlemen. You covenanted with me to work a whole day for a penny and I’ve given you a penny. I know these other folks have only worked an hour, but that wasn’t their fault. Nobody hired them before, so I’m going to give them a penny, just as I gave you. I’m choosing to be not merely just, I’m choosing to be positively good and generous.’

Then said the Lord of the vineyard to the other men, ‘And is your eye evil because I’m good?’ (v. 15). ‘Your eye evil’ didn’t mean their literal eyes, did it? When the Hebrews talked of an evil eye, they weren’t talking of witchcraft, they were talking of jealousy and envy. Have you seen two youngsters at a birthday party, and one has been dished out with a whole lot of cake and the other one thinks he hasn’t got as much cake as the first one? And, as we say in English, he eyes the other one: ‘Oh, look what he’s got.’ And the ancients, in their simplicity, picked that up and they talked about an evil eye to describe and to denote what we mean as envy.

If we can bring ourselves to that kind of humble way of thinking, we shall see how it was for an Israelite when he brought his sacrifice. As he realised that the inner workings of his own heart, his own psychology, were unworthy and abnormal and tainted, he was concerned to see that his sacrifice not only looked perfect from the outside, but when the thing was cut up and its inward parts were exposed, that they too were found healthy and in order. So we shall take leave from time to time, not excessively I hope, to think about

these details of sacrifices. They shall point us to our own inner states, and point us also to the Lord Jesus.

The burnt offering

So with that, let's come to this first sacrifice. What does it particularly represent? We may take our start once more by noticing its name. It was a burnt offering, and in the Hebrew language it means an offering that went up to God. As it burnt on the altar, the smoke, so to speak, the fragrance of it, ascended to God for God's enjoyment and satisfaction. And then we shall notice that this particular offering had this special feature. This was the offering, alone amongst all of them, that was offered, all of it, in its entirety. The whole of it was offered to God. That is to say, with the exception of the skin, which was reserved for the priest, the rest of the animal was offered wholly to God. And then we shall notice that it was offered to make atonement for sin and, finally, that of these particular offerings, it stands as the first one. Let's put that together.

An offering that was for God, the whole of it, standing first, obviously, because God comes first and must come first; and if we've come into his presence to look upon the glory of his holiness, first it must be. 'Thy name be hallowed, thy will be done'. God first must be satisfied. And in that connection let us observe again that it not only went up to God for God's satisfaction, but the whole of it went up, all of it. I can imagine an ignorant man from Galilee in later years coming down, and he'd got his offerings a bit mistaken. He wanted to give an offering to the Lord and he'd meant to give a peace offering. He comes to the priest with his little goat or something and he says to the priest, 'I want to offer a burnt offering.' And he really meant a peace offering, but he got it all muddled up.

As he stood there and the animal was carved up, he was expecting the priest to take one bit and put that on the altar, and then to give the rest of it back to him. And to his amazement as he stood there with the bits on the ground, the priest took the first bit and put that on, and then the next bit and put that on as well. Then the priest got the third bit and that went on. The man says to the priest,

'But wait a minute. When's my bit coming?'

'Oh, no, my son, it all has to go.'

'No, not all of it. I didn't mean to give it all.'

'What do you mean? You said a burnt offering.'

'But don't I get part of it back?'

'Sorry, no, you don't.'

'But I thought there was a sacrifice where you got some back for yourself.'

'There is, my son. That's a peace offering, but you said a burnt offering.'

Just imagine Zedekiah's amazement, poor old farmer, as he has to stand there and see the whole of it go up for God and not one little bit left over for him.

God's standard

What a standard for God to erect—all for God. It carries its lesson on its surface, doesn't it? As we come to God, his law will tell us what he requires of us. 'You may sum it up like this,'

says the Lord Jesus, 'the first and the greatest commandment of all is this: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your strength and all your soul' (Mark 12:30). In that moment, we begin to see how far we've come short. We just haven't done it. We still don't do it. One day we try to love him with all our hearts and we do well and then we find that we haven't been loving him with our minds. We've grown lazy in our minds: we don't study his word much. The difficult bits we leave, because they're hard. So we'd like to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, but we haven't been loving him with our minds.

And here come the theologians and they've been trying to love their God with all their minds, until their head bulges with the understanding of Old Testament and New; and they wake up to the fact that they haven't been loving him with all their strength. What requirements. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.' So now we begin to see something of the holiness of God, and therefore what sin is.

When we lived a long way off from the Lord, in our unconverted days maybe, our idea of sin was murdering your mother-in-law, perhaps, or cheating the income tax inspector. It might even be swearing too much. That's what we called sin, and sometimes as believers those ideas remain with us. 'So long as I haven't beaten up a policeman or robbed a bank or been rude to my maiden aunts, then I'm okay.' But wait a minute, my brother, my sister, have you loved the Lord your God with all your heart? For if you haven't, that's the biggest sin that you could possibly commit. Sin is not merely doing bad things: sin is failing to do the good thing.

Nothing but one hundred per cent zeal for the Lord is good enough for God. Not to love him with all our hearts, not to love him with all our minds, soul and strength—that is to be guilty of breaking the first and greatest commandment. That is to be guilty of the biggest sin. Oh, my brother, my sister, if that's God's standard, whatever shall I do? Do you know the second commandment? That is to love your neighbour as yourself. 'It's no good,' says John, stroking his patriarchal beard, 'to say you love God, whom you've not seen, if you don't love your neighbour, whom you have seen' (see 1 John 4:20). For the man or woman that really loves the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, will show the genuineness of their love to God in that they love their neighbour as themselves. Why ever did I come near to God if this is his standard?

An example—Abraham

Would you see it illustrated in Israel's history? Let me take you to one of the early examples of a burnt offering in Scripture. It will be familiar to you and I shall not need to spend much time on it. We read in Genesis 22 that there came a point when God said to Abraham, 'Come now, Abraham, and take your son, your only son, Isaac, and offer him up as a burnt offering to God.' For Abraham that was everything he had: all his future was bound up with Isaac. Says God, 'Abraham, I want it all.' The ancient rabbis, if you read their Talmud and the Midrashim, don't know whether the devotion of Abraham was the biggest thing, or whether it was the obedience of Isaac, now a youngish man, allowing himself to be bound and placed upon the altar ready to be sacrificed totally for God.

Or you may consider the idea of this sacrifice from the constant use of it in Israel for what is called the continual burnt offering. For when at length the tabernacle and then the temple was established, it was a rite in Israel, given by God, that every morning and every afternoon, day after day without intermission, there was to be offered on the altar in the temple court, the continual burnt offering. Day after day, as regularly as the sun rose and set, they had to offer, on behalf of the nation, a burnt offering to God. This was Israel saying, 'That is what God expects of us. That is our reasonable service and we don't come up to it. And God in his mercy allows us to offer a sacrifice instead of us.' As we think of those things, the matter interprets itself for us. As believers, we come near to God and the Holy Spirit begins to awaken in us what God's standards and requirements are and, as we come short, then the Holy Spirit points us to the Lord Jesus. What a relief it is. Let's go that way just now and turn from ourselves and look at him.

All for God

He gave himself to God, a sacrifice of a sweet smell: that's obedience. Now we see why this sacrifice was the chiefest of the sacrifices that made atonement for sin. Of course it was, because this matter of our coming short is very serious. We have broken, and constantly fall short of, the very chiefest of the commandments. Left to ourselves, we must perish. But it is written like this:

Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned. . . .

For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous. (Rom 5:12, 19)

Come with me a moment again to that sacred scene of Gethsemane. The king himself, a day or two before, had come riding into Jerusalem city and they strewed his way with their clothes and they waved their palm branches. Here was the king of Israel, Zion's king, prophesied for centuries, coming at last; and they shouted in their gladness: 'Blessed is the king that comes in the name of the Lord.' Even as the king rode into Jerusalem, he found Jerusalem and the very temple in the hands of thieves and robbers that were using the temple services to make money for themselves and had no time for God's king. Whatever should he do? However would he bring back a world lost in such rank disobedience, such perversion of religion? How would he bring back a world like that to God?

See him get off his donkey. No palms now, no clothes now on the ground to cushion his knees against the flinty stones of the Mount of Olives as the king kneels. What a sight it was for Gabriel and Michael. How heaven stood still to watch this amazing sight. It was the king of eternity on a rebel planet, where every other man and woman was tainted by stark disobedience, and the king knelt and said, 'Not my will, but thine be done.' We're saved through that, you know. 'Lo I come to do thy will, oh my God,' said he through the language of the psalm (see Ps 40:7-8). 'By which will we have been sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all' (Heb 10:10). Here was the answer to this world's

disobedience—an atonement for our sin and therefore the means of our forgiveness and our acceptance with God.

Or we could think of it in the terms of Philippians 2:10–11 which quotes the famous passage in Isaiah 45:23, where the transcendent Lord speaks, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee shall bow to me and every tongue confess to me the uniqueness of God.’ As we hear God talking like that through the old prophet, we shall probably say, ‘Yes, but that is God’s right. He is the unique Lord. He is the transcendent Lord. He is the Creator and source of all, and upholds everything in life. Of course he’s got the right to command that every knee shall bow to him.’ Oh, my brother, my sister, you must bow, for he is your Creator. Did I hear you say, ‘But what kind of a Creator is he? Do I detect a little bit of the tyrant in it that he says my knee must bow?’ Give God a century or two and he’ll show you what kind of a God he is that asks you to bow your knee in his name.

And so it happened that he who was in the form of God, really God, thought it not a thing to be grasped at to be on equal terms with God, but poured himself out and became a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, then he humbled himself and became obedient. Oh, you’ve not forgotten that this is he who is in the very form of God, never ceased to be God, but for your salvation, for your redemption, my fellow Christian, became a servant and was obedient unto death, and that, the death of the cross. And, when it proved to be the unalterable will of God that the likes of you and me should be redeemed from our sin and the Son of God was asked to do the redeeming, then the Son, very God though he was, became obedient unto death and that, the death of the cross.

‘Wherefore God has exalted him and given him a name which is above every name . . .’ now, listen how that Old Testament demand should be fulfilled—‘that in the name of God, every knee shall bow.’ But the name of God turns out to be the name of Jesus: ‘That in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow’ (Phil 2:9–10)—that Jesus who had become obedient unto death. If I’ve got it wrong, God will forgive me, but there are times in my devotions at the Lord’s Supper when, in my heart of hearts I tell the Father, ‘Yes, I gladly bow but, Father, I tell you, I’m bowing in the name of Jesus,’ for he tells me what God is like. He became obedient unto death for my sake.

One offering but three divisions

Let us therefore now, if we are on the right track, supplement our observations by considering some of the detail. You will have noticed from our reading that there are three possible divisions, three subclasses of this first offering. For if you wished, you could offer a bullock or sheep, or if you so pleased you could offer a bird. It is doubtless true, as is explicitly said in connection with other offerings, that this was a condescension of almighty God to the financial circumstances of his people. Rich people, and the nation as a whole, could bring a bullock. A poor widow woman could not afford a bullock; maybe the best she could bring would be a turtledove. Well, God allowed her to bring the turtledove. And people of middle income, perhaps they could manage a sheep even if they couldn’t manage a bullock. So at one level, it was practical, financial considerations that determined what kind of an offering you brought.

Three pictures of Christ

Tonight, however, we shall not be concerning ourselves so much with financial and practical things. Let us think of these things as they may help us typically to picture the Lord Jesus to ourselves. As we do so, I'm going to remind you of three successive verses from different parts of the Gospel of John, where John records for us that our Lord was one who did the will of God and finished his work.

A bullock

So our first class of offering is when they brought a bullock. If you know anything about ancient Israel and their agricultural methods, you will remember that the bullock was the work animal on every farm. They didn't plough with horses. They ploughed with bullocks. Their carts were pulled by bullocks. When they threshed the corn, the old corn sleigh was pulled around the threshing floor not by a horse, but by a bullock. That is what gave rise to the ancient legislation 'You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn' (Deut 25:4). For as the ox pulled the threshing sleigh round over the top of the corn on the threshing floor and threshed out the kernels of the wheat or the barley, the ox had to be allowed, every now and again, to dip its old head and munch up a bit of the corn that it was threshing. And so the ox lived on the work it was doing; and God, in his kindness, had that regulation put in for oxen.

When you come to the New Testament, Paul says, 'And is God only concerned for oxen, my brothers?' (1 Cor 9:9). Of course not. In that bit of regulation about oxen, you will see a principle that will guide us in the way we treat those of our brethren and sisters who work for us in the gospel or in the ministry of the Word. For when God's regulation says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn,' you can apply the principle to the Christian worker. If he preaches the gospel and gives his whole time to the preaching of the gospel, then you'll not muzzle him. He has a right to be supported financially by those to whom he preaches the gospel, for the worker has a right to live of his work.

And we go further still, for if it's a principle that can be applied to Christian workers, shall it not be applied to the Lord Jesus, the worker? Let me remind you of what is written in John 4. There our Lord Jesus came in his journeys to the well of Sychar and he sat on the well, tired out with his journey and hungry too, for God's work can be exhausting. The disciples were gone away to fetch food. Meanwhile, there came a woman of Samaria and our Lord got talking to her. This must have gone on some time, because presently the disciples came back. They didn't like to interrupt, though they were a bit surprised to see their Lord talking to a woman in public, and about theology as well. Jewish rabbis didn't do that kind of thing, and she was just a woman!

However, they didn't interrupt until the conversation was over and the woman was gone, and then they came saying, 'Lord, you'll be very hungry: here's some food.' And he said, 'But I've food to eat that you know nothing about, gentlemen.' They said, 'Has anybody brought him lunch then?' 'No,' he said, 'my food is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work.' Oh, what a delightful insight into the heart of the Saviour. He came wearied, sat tired and worn out on the well, and then there came the opportunity to talk to a woman in all her dissatisfaction. He talked to her about God and the lovely gift of

God's Holy Spirit and the eternal satisfactions of eternal life—and in doing it, he was fed himself. Working for God was his food. I don't mean he earned his money by it, but that deeper satisfaction of working for God, of loving his neighbour, of bringing men and women to the Lord.

And when I think that he not only sought me and saved me, but somehow or other he got satisfaction out of doing it, it makes me hold my head in shame. How often I've gone about the Lord's work as a cumbersome duty and got tired in it: not so much because it was rigorous, but I didn't want to do it. Have you noticed when you don't want to do things, how soon you get tired? Here's a chap in a factory all day long, pulling a lever. I should get bored stiff after the first five minutes but he manages to stick it for eight hours. He's tired but he rushes home and gets his tea. He's got a chance for a game of football. Do you know, he isn't tired anymore! For the next hour-and-a-half, he isn't tired. Why? Because it's interesting. He'd go without his tea to get there. Sometimes we find the Lord's work tiring because we're not all that interested. Of course it can be hard. May God give us the grace to be more like the Saviour; that we shall not only work hard for the Lord but find in his work our spiritual satisfaction.

A sheep

The second division was that of a sheep. Sheep are so often used in symbols and metaphors in the Old Testament that we'll have no difficulty recognising ourselves as sheep. There is that unforgettable verse in Isaiah 53 which says that we are all like sheep in this unfortunate particular: 'All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned every one to his own way' (v. 6). Unlike Christ, for in John 5:30, he says, 'I judge and I judge justly, because I seek not my own will, but the will of him that sent me.' One day our Lord shall have the awesome task of being the judge of all mankind, when he sits finally on the great white throne of God. What a task—and his judgment will be perfectly just because, in his life, he sought solely not his own will, but the will of God.

A turtledove

And finally, you could offer a sacrifice of a bird. In John 6:38–39, our Lord once more and finally talked of his doing the will of God and he put it like this, 'I have come down from heaven to do the will of him that sent me.' Would you allow me finally to use that picture of a bird to illustrate the point? Says the regulation to the priest: 'You shall take the bird and bring it to the altar.' I watch the priest doing it: he's got the bird in his hand and he's going to take it to the altar. He's about to wrench it in two by the wings, and I say to myself, 'Mr Priest, sir, you'd never have got that bird to the altar unless it had first come down.' And I think of our Lord at Calvary. Why did he come? 'I came down from heaven,' he said, 'to do the will of him that sent me, and his will is this, that of all that he hath given me, I should lose nothing' (John 6:38–39).

I watch therefore with greater interest. Is it God's will that the blessed Saviour should save me and all the other millions that have trusted in him, and lose not one of them? It is indeed. How well will the Saviour do it: will he do it perfectly? For if he does it perfectly,

I shall be saved too and I shall never be lost. And I draw near to the altar and there's the bird, and the priest stretched out its wings and pulled it in two, and it's lying on the altar now. I like to think I can see those wings. Oh, those lovely wings, so balanced, that brought it down to the altar, and I look at Christ.

Do you know there are some folks who say that our Lord could have gone straight home to heaven from the Mount of Transfiguration? I know what they mean, but I sincerely doubt it. He need never have come. He came voluntarily, but when he came to our earth, he loved the Lord, his God, with all his heart, mind, soul and strength. That was the one wing of it. How could he go home and leave this world, a rebel against God? Ah, he loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus and, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the uttermost—and that was the other wing of it.

On wings of love, came down,
And wept, and bled, and died:
What he endured, O who can tell,
To save our souls from death and hell!¹

By that man's obedience we, the many, are constituted righteous. How does it make you feel, my brother, my sister? Does it fill you with joy that, for his sake, you are accepted with God and able to draw near? Does it make you feel that now you're free to go out and live just as you like? You say, 'No, God forbid. If that's what Christ did for me, then I want to be like him and give my all to God.' I thought so. That's God's way, my brother, my sister, of making you holy.

¹ Samuel Stennett (1727–95), 'Come every thankful heart.'

Celebration of New Life

This study will be based on Leviticus 2. The offering which we are about to consider is called the meal offering, though in some of the older translations, you will find it described as the meat offering; simply because, in those far-off days, the word 'meat' in English meant something to eat, that's all, and not necessarily flesh. Nowadays, to get the exact meaning, we shall have to translate it 'meal', for this was an offering composed of corn of some kind and it could be in three different forms. So I shall be asking you to notice that in this chapter there are three sections to this meal offering. The first one is the corn offered to the Lord in the form of flour; the second is the corn offered to the Lord in the form of cakes, baked or fried or griddled; and the third is the corn offered to the Lord in the green ear, roast with fire, as an offering of firstfruits.

And when anyone offereth an oblation of a meal offering unto the LORD, his oblation shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon: and he shall bring it to Aaron's sons the priests: and he shall take thereout his handful of the fine flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof; and the priests shall burn *it as* the memorial thereof upon the altar, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD: and that which is left of the meal offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire. (vv. 1-3)

So far then, the first division. Now the second division.

And when thou offerest an oblation of a meal offering baken in the oven, it shall be unleavened cakes of fine flour, mingled with oil, or unleavened wafers anointed with oil. And if thy oblation be a meal offering of the baking pan, it shall be of fine flour unleavened, mingled with oil. Thou shalt part it in pieces, and pour oil thereon: it is a meal offering. And if thy oblation be a meal offering of the frying pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. And thou shalt bring the meal offering that is made of these things unto the LORD: and it shall be presented unto the priest, and he shall bring it unto the altar. And the priest shall take up from the meal offering the memorial thereof, and shall burn it upon the altar: an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. And that which is left of the meal offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire. No meal offering, which ye shalt offer unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, as an offering made by fire unto the LORD. As an oblation of *firstfruits* ye shall offer them unto the LORD: but they shall not come up for a sweet savour on the altar. And every oblation of thy meal offering shalt thou season with salt;

neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meal offering: with all thine oblations, thou shalt offer salt. (vv. 4–13)

So much then for the second division. Now for the third and final division.

And if thou offer a meal offering of firstfruits unto the LORD, thou shalt offer for the meal offering of thy firstfruits corn in the ear parched with fire, bruised corn of the fresh ear. And thou shalt put oil upon it, and lay frankincense thereon: it is a meal offering. And the priest shall burn the memorial of it, part of the bruised corn thereof, and part of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof: it is an offering made by fire unto the LORD. (vv. 14–16)

And to help us put this into context, let's read now a few verses from Deuteronomy 26.

And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possesset it, and dwellest therein: that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which thou shalt bring in from thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee; and thou shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there. And thou shalt come unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the land which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God. And thou shalt answer and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian² ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: and we cried unto the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression: and the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: and he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it down before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God: and thou shalt rejoice in all the good which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is in the midst of thee. (vv. 1–11)

What a happy portion of Scripture it is. May God fill our hearts with a similar joy.

And so we come to the study of the second of the major offerings described for us in the book of Leviticus. We are using these offerings in the first place to tell us something of Israel's experience, as they came to God who dwelled among them—came at his invitation to contemplate his glory, the glory of his holiness, the awesomeness of it and the beauty of it. And as they came to him, perceiving his holiness and his glory, they were to bring their offerings, their gifts, as well as their sacrifices for sin, that they might cultivate the fellowship

² That is, a nomad, a wandering Syrian.

with God that God had graciously opened to them. And then we're using these offerings to apply to ourselves. For we too are invited to come near to God, not now in some literal tabernacle on earth; we're invited to come into the very holiest of all in heaven, to stand in spirit in the immediate presence of God that we too might consider the beauty of God and the awesomeness, the loveliness of his holiness.

As we do so, like Israel we shall find that the holiness of God not only fills our heart with amazement, but fills us with a sense of our own shortcoming. So, as we bring our gifts of praise and worship to the Lord, our hearts will from time to time be filled with a sense of their own unworthiness. And thank God, at that stage, God will be able to point us to the sacrifice, not now of animals or cereals, but to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord, offered once and for all upon the cross for us, but valid still and valid eternally. That sacrifice through which we came to God, first as sinners; that sacrifice now in the merits of which we come to God as his saints, as his people. As we remember how the sacrifice of Christ meets our need before God, we observe that it does something else. For these sacrifices had, each one, to be perfect in its way that it might rightly represent the Lord Jesus. And so it comes about that as we feel our need and shortcomings and God points us to the sacrifice of Christ, then the Holy Spirit will go further and point out to us how it is that the Lord Jesus was able to be our sacrifice—for this reason: that where we come short, he was perfect.

And our heart will be enthralled by the wonder and the perfection of his living and the more we know how hard it is ourselves to live to the glory of God and the more abysmal failures we feel, the more we shall admire the wonder of the perfections of our Lord Jesus and long to be like him. Indeed, as we lose ourselves in thinking about him, in admiring him and worshiping him, perhaps unconsciously we shall become more like him.

When we were considering the first offering, we found that it had to be offered entirely to God; everything offered to God, except the skin, and it reminded us of God's claim upon us. Not only the first offering, but the offering to be offered entire, and it spoke to us of the demands of God's holy law that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. So you say to me, 'If the first offering tells me that really I ought to give God everything I've got, well then you can't have any more offerings, because I haven't anything left to offer. So how do you manage to have a second offering as well?' Yes, that's a bit curious, isn't it?

A free-will offering

I think you'll see the point if, first of all, we come and consider the name of this sacrifice. It's called in Hebrew a *mincha*, which means a gift. It can be a gift that is a free will gift, a present, just as when you like somebody and you want to show how much you value them and how much you love them, you think of some lovely present that you could give them. Sometimes it can be used in the sense of tribute, like those presents we give the income tax inspector; now and again, just to show how much we love him, we pay our taxes! Presents then, or tributes, but of course while God required these presents from time to time, there were certain days, certain times, morning and evening, when the nation were required to bring one.

With other sacrifices, they had to bring one, but a great deal of it was left to Israel's voluntary behaviour. For instance, in that passage which we have read, when they came and took their firstfruits, they could come and bring a present to the Lord. For God, I suspect, thought simply like this: that because he had blessed his people with innumerable blessings, his people now and again would feel in their hearts they'd like to give God a present. You know, something they didn't have to give but they wanted to do it anyway. Have you never felt like that?

The law comes along and tells us that we ought to love the Lord our God with all our mind, heart, soul and strength, and we strive to do it and often come grievously short. There are other occasions, my brother, my sister, when you feel in your heart that, even unasked, you'd like voluntarily to bring God a present. The third division of the sacrifice reminds us that amongst the many presents they could give to God, it was specially in connection with the firstfruits that they frequently as individuals gave their presents to the Lord.

Firstfruits

In Israel there were two kinds of firstfruits. There was when the green corn came up and grew until now the ear was fully formed, not yet ripe, still green and luscious, and they took an omer of it, a sheaf of it, and waved it before the Lord and, along with that, they offered offerings of firstfruits. And then there was the occasion at the beginning of the harvest when they were reaping their corn harvest, some fifty days later. They took their corn and they ground it into flour and they baked their cakes and they came and offered firstfruits to the Lord.

Deuteronomy pictures the scene. Here's farmer Zedekiah and he has now inherited his own farm. Perhaps his father has died and he's come into this farm. This is the first year and it's been a bumper crop, and he's got his house and he's got his cattle and his sheep; and there's his wine press already waiting for the grapes that are forming on the vine; and there are the figs. There are his two acres of corn, and he reaps it and his wife proudly takes the flour and bakes such superb cakes. The sheer joy of it, and he can't contain his heart and he says, 'This is tremendous. I feel God's redemption of me is real: it has worked, you know. My father was an old wandering Syrian with no two acres on earth to call his own. And then we went from bad to worse and we were slaves in Egypt. And then God came and swore to our fathers that he would redeem us; and it sounded a tall story to start with, but he did it and he brought us out of Egypt. He brought us through the wilderness and look, we're here! Look at this corn and I'm eating it.'

It was tremendous and in the sheer joy of it, he thought he'd like to give God a present of his firstfruits. He'd put them in a basket and go up to Jerusalem; and he'd set it down before the priest and say, 'You know, priest, your God has actually done it. It's real. I'd like to give some firstfruits to the Lord.' And the priest being very severe and reverent, of course, he said, 'Well done, my son,' and took these firstfruits and offered them to God. Perhaps it's along that route that we shall first find the application to ourselves.

Firstfruits—a practical lesson for us

We have many material things to praise God for, compared with some. What a mercy we don't live in Ethiopia, and we've got cornflakes to put into our mouths, and comfortable homes and carpets, and ten thousand other things in God's mercy. How does it come that we have them while others don't? Does it ever make you feel that you'd like just to pause a minute and thank God; and give God something just because he's given you so much? Not now because his law requires it, but because the sheer gratitude of your heart inspires you to make God a present on the side, without telling anybody much, for his sheer goodness to you. But it's not merely the Lord's goodness to us in terms of bread and vegetables and homes and furniture and things. We have another kind of firstfruits that Israel perhaps never dreamt of, though some of them might have dreamt of them, I suppose.

I imagine old Zedekiah the farmer: now he's grown old and he's about seventy plus. He's leaning over his farm gate one morning and looking at the corn now coming through the ground. It's springtime and there it is, shimmering in the sun, all the little sprouts of the green corn coming up through the ground. And Zedekiah says to himself, 'It's a marvel: I've seen it now seventy times over and I never cease to be amazed at the miracle of it. You put the seed in the ground and it appears to die. Then come the springtime, the miracle happens and up it comes. It's a magnificent miracle: we couldn't do it ourselves and yet our continued existence depends on this miracle of nature that the corn goes into the ground and dies and then comes up again and yields much fruit.' Then Zedekiah begins to think, 'I've seen it a lot of times now, but I shan't see it through many more times. One of these days now, they'll take my body and sow it in the ground. And when they sow me in the ground, will I ever come up again?'

'Man dies and wastes away. If a man dies, shall he live again?' (Job 14:10, 14). The Old Testament gave certain answers to that question, but not anywhere near so clearly as the New Testament does, and what a marvel it is. We know the answer and we know it's real. Standing with our basket of firstfruits, we think of another greater firstfruits:

Now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Cor 15:20, 22 KJV)

We older folks, in spite of all the many gifts we've known in life, wouldn't be too happy if we've got to leave them and that was the end. Thank God it's not the end, because 'now is Christ risen and become the firstfruits.' It actually happened. It's not some vague hope for the future. It is one of the greatest and best-recorded events in history when Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. 'Now is Christ risen and become the firstfruits of them that slept' (1 Cor 15:20). As sure as the firstfruits of the corn lead on to the harvest, so shall the resurrection of our Lord lead on to the resurrection of all his people, each in his own order—first of all Christ, the firstfruits, and afterwards those that are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor 15:23).

My brother, my sister, if this is true, does it make you feel you'd like to give God a present for it somehow? You say, 'Yes, but the Lord's coming is a long way off perhaps.' There's another kind of firstfruits though. When the corn was green, now come into the ear,

they took it and they waved a sheaf of it before the Lord, and they offered their firstfruits sacrifices on the altar. Fifty days later when the corn was ripe, they cut the harvest and, when they had cut it and threshed it and then milled it and got the flour, they made it into cakes. But the first of those cakes was given to the Lord: firstfruits to the Lord on the day of Pentecost, as the New Testament calls it.

And the whole thing becomes a transparent parable to us, doesn't it? For our Lord rose from the dead on the third day, the firstfruits of them that slept. Fifty days after that, the Feast of Pentecost came. And what happened on the Feast of Pentecost? You say, 'The Holy Spirit came down from heaven.' He did indeed, and 'by one spirit were you all baptised into one body' (1Cor 12:13). Oh, the wonder of it.

Let me just pick out one feature, one significance, of the coming of that Holy Spirit, and it is this. Says Paul in Romans 8:23, 'We have the firstfruits of the Spirit.' So we've got two lots of firstfruits then! We've got Christ, the firstfruits, bodily risen from the dead—a promise that one day we too shall be raised and changed. And while we wait for his coming, we have the Holy Spirit, firstfruits of all those greater glories that are yet to be. Oh, what folks we are, waiting for the Lord, waiting for our resurrection—or if we have not died when he comes, waiting to be changed to have a body like the body of his glory. And already here and now, the firstfruits of the Spirit in our hearts.

My brother, my sister, when you feel you'd like to give something, I know you can't repay him, but you'd like to come and celebrate, wouldn't you? Put your basket down for five minutes and say, 'The Lord has given me so much. Before he gives me any more, as he's likely to do soon now, let me give him something, if it's only a thank you from my heart.' What can we give him? Compared with what he's given us, very little indeed.

Firstfruits—pictures of Christ

I want now to come to this offering in Leviticus 2 and take it not so much from a practical point of view. Borrowing my lessons from Israel, I want to come and take it in its strictly typical viewpoint. Like all the other offerings, it speaks not merely of what Israel gave to God; it speaks of the Lord Jesus, who gave himself for us. And here it's very easy to interpret this type, this *mincha*, this meal offering. Let's notice its major ingredients. It was made of corn in various forms. The corn could be milled and offered as flour; the corn could be offered as flour, now baked into cakes or, in the third division, the corn could be offered as it was in the ear, before it was milled.

You say, 'Mr Preacher, that's a funny way of organising a chapter. Why didn't Moses start the logical way round and start with the corn in the ear? Isn't that where we have to start anyway? Start with that at the first level, the corn in the ear and then proceed to the corn threshed and milled into flour, and then finally, with the flour baked into cakes?' Isn't that the order we know in life? Old Farmer Giles up the road grows the corn, and it comes on ear. That's the first stage, and then he cuts it and threshes it and the miller grinds it and delivers it to you in the supermarket in your nice paper bags of flour. Then finally, the housewife takes it home and, with her consummate skill, she bakes it into a cake and there it is sitting on the table, the *pièce de résistance*, to the admiration of all her guests. Yes, you

would have thought it would have been that way, wouldn't you? But Moses has gone and put it another way. How odd. We might even discover why, presently.

Anyway, it is made of corn in various forms of flour or bread or corn in the ear, and what shall that speak to us of? We cannot resist the parallel. When they baked it into their cakes of bread, then they were to break it in pieces. We Christians have a ceremony—it isn't a sacrifice or an offering to God, it's simply a memorial feast—and we take bread and we break it and the bread is a symbol of what? Pray notice, you theologians, not of our Lord's character. No, it's a symbol of his body. He took the bread and he said, 'This is my body.' Or again, we think of 1 Corinthians 15:37–38, where Paul uses corn as an illustration: he says, 'The thing you get out of the ground is not the thing you sow, for you sow maybe a bare grain of wheat or something else. God gives it a body as it has pleased him.'

What's he talking about? He's illustrating the resurrection of our bodies, not the resurrection of our characters, and as we have already seen, the third division of this sacrifice is the offering of firstfruits, and when we think of firstfruits, we think first of all of our blessed Lord. 'Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits' and we're thinking not of the resurrection of his character but of the resurrection of his body. If then the New Testament is consistent in its use of symbols, the first ingredient of this sacrifice talks to us about the body of our Lord Jesus.

And then there was oil. In the actual practical sacrifice of Israel, the oil was offered doubtless because it spelt to the Israelite something exceedingly rich, and he wanted to give a rich present to God. In symbolic language, as Zechariah 4 tells us, oil is a symbol of spirit. You remember the vision of Zechariah with the great lampstand, fed by two olive trees that poured the oil constantly into the lamps. And the lesson was 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord' (Zech 4:6). Put those two things together, flour representing body and oil representing spirit, and you'll have what adds up to a human being.

There was a third element and that was frankincense, but it was all offered to God, a sheer delight to God. On that, therefore, I do not comment further, save to say this: that when we come to consider the person of Jesus Christ our Lord, there's something about him that is solely for God. As he himself remarked, 'No one really knows the Son, except the Father' (Matt 11:27). Let us remember now as we pause a moment that there are mysteries about the person of our Lord Jesus that surpass our fathoming. Only God understands them. But reverently, we may consider him who was perfect in his manhood. Perfect body, unfallen spirit, and he gave himself for us. 'By which will we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all' (Heb 10:10). Oh, that lovely person, that lovely holy body, born of the virgin, born taintless and sinless. How carefully the Holy Spirit guards the flesh of Jesus Christ our Lord. When he speaks in Romans 8:3, he puts it this way, 'God sending his Son—not in sinful flesh, but—in the likeness of sinful flesh,' truly human with real flesh, a real body, but with this difference: that his flesh wasn't sinful flesh like ours. He was perfect in his humanity. What a wonderful thing those thirty-three years were.

For all the thousands of years that had passed since Adam, this earth had never seen a perfect human body and hasn't seen one since. We've seen some lovely specimens, from real he-men who are strong and beautiful; and ladies, charming in their delights. But the best we've ever seen have been bodies broken by sin. His body was perfect, and still in glory he

has a body. After his resurrection, he came to his disciples and said, 'Look, handle me and see. A spirit doesn't have flesh and bone like you see me have' (Luke 24:39). It tells us that God intends a human body eternally. It is an integral part of what it means to be human. With what relief we contemplate the Lord. We too have bodies, and it's good that we don't forget it, because much of our behaviour depends upon our bodies. And our bodies being broken sometimes puts our behaviour out of gear. Sometimes, when things are going very well and we feel ourselves very spiritual, it can be because we're making great progress in the things of the spirit. Sometimes it can be simply because we had some lovely sausages for dinner and we feel very good and we haven't got the flu, or anything else, and all the old glands are working well and we feel tremendous.

It's not necessarily spirituality, my brother, my sister. I don't want to disappoint you, but it simply could be that your body is in good health. Here's a good man and he's full of anxiety and apprehension and full of fears and he's nervous and can't sit still, and he's all worked up. You say to him, 'My brother, if only you had the Holy Spirit within you, you would be calm and peaceful.' Go easy. If the doctors were to come along and take a little bit of one of his glands away, the adrenalin maybe, or the pituitary gland, then he'd be as calm as you, perhaps a little bit calmer. Why? Because these funny old things called glands in our bodies affect our behaviour more than we think. 'You're as bold as a lion, my brother. You would face anybody—the Prime Minister even, and without trembling, you'd preach them the gospel.' You see that other good lady over there and you say, 'My dear sister, pluck up your courage, get hold of the Lord and trust the Holy Spirit and witness to everybody.' But you never did know what nerves were, not since your cradle; and she, poor woman, has inherited a body and a nervous system that's been broken by generations, perhaps by the sinning of her parents and grandparents. Let's remember that a lot of our behaviour and a lot of our very poor behaviour is in part the result of the fact that our bodies are broken. Remembering that, we shall be a little bit more merciful with one another: at least I hope you will be with me! We have inherited fallen bodies ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the garden and man fell.

Here we come to the second element: man is body and spirit and, as originally made, his spirit was meant to be in touch with the Father of spirit and in control of his body. But man rebelled against the Father of spirit and, as Ephesians 2:1 would have it, became spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and in sins, and became a carnal man, not having the Spirit. And, in consequence, a man's own spirit is fallen and instead of being in control of his body as it should be, he's very often little more than a prisoner in the castle. How lovely to think of our blessed Lord with that superb control with which he controlled his body and all its appetites. Witness his temptations in the wilderness. For he was conceived of the Spirit and anointed of the Spirit and led of the Spirit, his own spirit being utterly unfallen and perfect in his control of his body, and he gave himself for us.

A new spirit

What is the programme for our redemption, my brother, my sister? Well the programme is that God is going to put us right, both in spirit and in body. God's programme is that he starts

first of all with our spirit. He doesn't start with our bodies, necessarily: he starts with our spirit, and we are born again by God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us and witnesses with our spirit and helps alongside our infirmity; and the work of remaking, of redemption, has already begun. You say to me, 'But I'm far from perfect yet.' Yes, but already you have sensed the renewing of God's Holy Spirit within—new desires, new powers, new energies. Though far from perfect, you have the firstfruits of the Spirit in your heart.

A new body

Now I mustn't depress you too much, but I have to tell you that just as of now, you cannot claim healing for your body through redemption. The atonement of Christ guarantees that one day our bodies will be redeemed, but the redemption of our bodies lies still in the future. 'We wait for our adoption, that is the redemption of the body' (Rom 8:23). God in his mercy has put all sorts of mechanisms in our bodies so that they can get better. Think of how many colds you have recovered from, because God in his mercy put the processes in the body so the body could recover. And what is more, God in his kindness is prepared now and again to intervene and do a miracle to heal his people bodily.

Only we can't claim it now. Give us all fifty years and most of us will have gone home! That's not as if God's programme has come unstuck, for the redemption of the body waits for the coming of the Lord. Meanwhile, our Lord leaves us in these broken old bodies and they're difficult to control sometimes. At least mine is, yours may be a Rolls-Royce affair—air brakes and power-assisted steering and all of that. A change of gear and you go down the road smoothly. Here I come in my old banger of a Mini Minor; I turn the steering wheel meaning to go over there, and it goes over here. My banger of a Mini is more difficult to drive than your beautiful Rolls-Royce: if only I had your Rolls-Royce, I might be able to drive it beautifully down the street. But who knows, I might turn out a better driver in the end, after having had to drive a poor old banger of a Mini of a broken body and personality. For God doesn't leave us here in these bodies to torment us, but to train us: the training is going on and the inner man is being renewed, even though the outer man perishes.

But before I let you go tonight, I have talked of the first division—of what a man is, body and spirit, and how our Lord was perfect, truly human; in this respect, a perfect body, sinless and unbroken, an unfallen spirit and in perfect control all his life. When it came to the end, 'by the eternal spirit he offered himself to God' (Heb 9:14), the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once and for all. Yes, and we have thought of our bodies, how they're broken, and God's way and programme for putting them right and eventually redeeming us completely—a reborn spirit and a body fashioned like to the body of his glory. And we have thought of Christ then as our firstfruits and that is the third division of our offering. If you offer a meal offering of firstfruits, you shall bring it to the Lord, green ears parched in the fire, and we think of the Lord Jesus, the firstfruits already risen and at home in heaven.

The heat of life's experiences

But there is a middle division—what is that about? It's about the flour taken and processed and put into cakes, griddled and baked and fried and various other things that the ladies all

know about. But what's that got to do with me and why does it come in the middle? For if the first bit tells us of the constituent parts of a human personality, body and spirit, that's what we are already. And the last bit is going to tell us of the resurrection of the Lord, the firstfruits, and presently we shall have a body like his. But what lies in between? You say, 'Life lies in between.' Yes, life—life's experiences, life sufferings, life's happinesses.

I know nothing very much about cooking, save that the results can be nice if the ladies do it. But this I know, that when you get oil, flour and all the other things that ladies put in, then you put it in the oven, when you take it out, it's the same stuff as went in, isn't it? You say, 'Yes, it's the same stuff that went in, but it comes out very different, somehow or other.' Yes, because the fire has done something to it; made it a lot more pleasant to eat really. What a parable it is. We start off body and spirit. We see it in a little child, born body and spirit. Is that all a human being is? No. As life goes by, you'll see that human being begin to change. They'll not only grow up physically but mature psychologically and mentally as a person.

Here's a beautiful young thing. She's eighteen, delightful in body and spirit. Here's mum, I won't tell you how old she is—just a grey hair or two visible if you look very closely. She's still very attractive looking, but she's different from the girl. There's a bit more to Mum: she's had these years of experience and it's done something to her. It was meant to do something to her. It isn't that life has come along and spoil her necessarily. That is what a human being is. You start off with body and spirit and a tremendous memory and a capability of a personality and then life comes along, with all its different pressures and its heats. The heat of success and happiness, the heat of sorrow and failure, and the human personality goes through it. As it goes through it, it begins to change—it was meant to change. It's not an accident, you know. When you ladies put the mixture in the oven, you don't stand there wringing your hands saying, 'Poor old cake. It's going through the heat now.' Of course not. It was meant to go through the heat. How on earth do you expect to get a decent cake if it doesn't go through the heat? God is looking for mature sons and daughters. How do you suppose he's going to get them without putting us through the heat?

Christ learned obedience by the things which he suffered

You won't take me up wrong in what I'm about to say now, will you, for I speak very reverently. But life did that for Jesus Christ our Lord himself. He was perfect in all his ways, constitutionally perfect, but as a little boy, I'm told, he grew. He grew in wisdom, says Luke's holy word. And the Epistle to the Hebrews, explaining how it is that he can become for us such a merciful high priest, says he learned obedience—learned what it cost—by the things which he suffered (Heb 5:8). That is, life's experiences marked him. They were meant to and the glorified Lord Jesus in heaven carries with him still the marks of his experience here on earth. He remembers it still and being made perfect—it doesn't say 'being made sinless': he was always sinless—but as a human being, he grew up as a child, grew in wisdom and went through circumstances ordained of God, and eventually Gethsemane and Calvary. Now he is qualified to be your high priest through what he experienced. That's how life is meant to be. He came through perfectly.

Alas for us, some cakes when they come out of the oven, haven't behaved very well. To confess my sins, I made a cake once. Well it wasn't a cake so much: it was one of those things that we in England call Yorkshire puddings. The intention was good, but I know not whether it was the old recipe book, which tends to be silly, or it was the oven that was wrong, or something. I had the very best of intentions and put this marvellous mixture into the oven, and when the thing came out, it was as flat and as leathery as you could imagine. Not even the dog would eat it. It was no use. I never tried again, because if Yorkshire puddings are going to react like that on me, I give them up.

Reacting to the heat

When we go through the fire of life, be it success or failure, we can react well and come through matured. And our fellow believers can see it and they say, 'You see Mrs So-and-So over there, what a time she's been through; but she's a better woman for it. She was good before, but she's better now. She tastes better, if you see what I mean—mellower, kinder if possible, more understanding. Yes, and Brother So-and-So, he used to be a bit bumptious in his youth, but then he came a cropper once or twice and now, what a lovely man he is and how sympathetic he is with other folks.' Yes, they've been through the fires and they're reacting right.

It can happen that when we go through the fires of success or suffering, we react wrongly. Like my Yorkshire pudding, we go a bit flat, soured, embittered, full of self-pity and complaint, with an endless sense of injustice about other people, what they've done to us and, 'Why didn't God do better for me than this?' and all that kind of thing. What a pity. We are being prepared for eternity, and life and its experiences are part of that preparation. They are making us for eternity. May God give us the grace to react rightly, to enjoy the success, but not let it spoil us, to make us proud and arrogant and selfish and self-centred; to endure the suffering and not allow it to make us full of self-pity, or to break our faith.

Remember the salt

How shall I react rightly? Our ancient passage says this: 'With all your sacrifices, you shall offer salt and you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be absent from any one of your sacrifices' (Lev 2:13). So salt had to be offered with every sacrifice, but the Holy Spirit chose to mention it here in connection with the cooking of the cakes. Yes, when I'm going through the fire, then I shall need to lay hold upon the covenant of God—his absolute faithfulness that he will neither leave me, nor let me down.

That's what brought Paul through. I see him in my mind, floating around in the Mediterranean, holding on for dear life to a bit of wood. I say, 'Paul, you're having a rough time out there. Some God you have. I heard you preaching about him earlier to the Thessalonians, and you were saying how marvellous God is and how you love to serve him. Some God, Paul, to let you down like that, holding on to a bit of wood and nearly drowning. What do you think of God now?' And what do you think Paul would say? 'I can't understand why God has done this to me. There's Demas and he's forsaken me and gone after this world. He's driving his Rolls-Royce and has a palatial house, and he isn't serving

the Lord as he should. And here's me, I've given everything for the Lord and here I'm in the sea. And this isn't the first time either: I've been shipwrecked before and beaten with rocks and stones. This isn't good enough.'

Is that how you suppose he would talk? If he could get the seawater out of his mouth, he's more likely to reply, 'Stop criticising God, for I am persuaded that neither life nor death, nor principalities nor powers, nor mights nor dominions, nor things past, present or future, nor height nor depth, not even this Mediterranean, can separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, my Lord' (see Rom 8:38–39). And he went home, triumphant.

May God give me the grace that I may come through life like that and go home a well-cooked and mature cake. There then let us leave our study, and praise God for him upon whom our hopes depend. He knows what it is like to be tempted. He has been through the fires himself and we are told that because he has suffered being tempted, when we go through the fires, he is able to help and to succour those that are tempted.

[Making Man Whole](#)

Tonight we begin to study the peace offering found in Leviticus 3. Now that chapter puts one side of a very big question and, as I prepared this series, I had originally thought that I should perhaps have been able to combine both that side and the other side of this story, which is found in Leviticus 7, and is contained under the law of the peace offering. But wiser counsels prevailed, and rather than keep you an inordinate length of time this evening, it seemed to me better that I should just confine myself to one side of the question this evening and then find some time on another occasion to put the other side of the question.

So now let us begin our study proper by reading from Leviticus 3:

And if his oblation be a sacrifice of peace offerings; if he offer of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of his oblation, and kill it at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about. And he shall offer of the sacrifice of peace offerings an offering made by fire unto the LORD; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is on them, which is by the loins, and the caul upon the liver, with the kidneys, shall he take away. And Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt offering, which is upon the wood that is on the fire: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. And if his oblation for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD be of the flock; male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. If he offer a lamb for his oblation, then he shall offer it before the LORD: and he shall lay his hand upon the head of his oblation, and kill it before the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall sprinkle the blood thereof upon the altar round about. And he shall offer of the sacrifice of peace offerings an offering made by fire unto the LORD; the fat thereof, the fat tail entire, he shall take it away hard by the backbone; and the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the loins, and the caul upon the liver, with the kidneys, shall he take away. And the priest shall burn it upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire unto the LORD. And if his oblation be a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD: and he shall lay his hand upon the head of it, and kill it before the tent of meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall sprinkle the blood thereof upon the altar round about. And he shall offer thereof his oblation, *even* an offering made by fire unto the LORD; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the loins, and the caul upon the liver, with the kidneys, shall he take away. And the priests shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire, for a

sweet savour: all the fat is the LORD'S. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings, that ye shall eat neither fat nor blood. (vv. 1-17)

May God give us good understanding of his holy Word.

The name of the offering

In order to get some understanding of the particular offering that we now begin to study, I suggest to you that we should pay close attention, first of all, to its name. In our English translations, it is called the peace offering. I am aware that in the scholarly literature, the exact translation of the Hebrew term has been much disputed in these recent years and scholarly opinion remains divided as to exactly the significance of the Hebrew words that underlie our English translation. For my part, I join with those who retain the older understanding and say that we should link the word for peace offering, as we find it in the Hebrew language, with the general Hebrew word *shalōm* and its cognates, meaning 'peace'. This understanding of the name of the sacrifice fits in best of all with the function and use of this sacrifice as we find it described here in chapter 3, and subsequently in the law of the peace offering in chapter 7.

'Peace' then, but with that we should remember that the Hebrew word *shalōm* is a word of far wider meaning than our English word 'peace'. Like our English word, it does mean the absence of hostility or the end of hostility. It is the opposite to strife, the opposite of war. It's the thing that we make when we lay down our arms and come to agreement with our enemies and we enjoy peace together—the absence of enmity, the cessation of strife.

But *shalōm* in Hebrew means much more than that. I remember in my youth when, after the war with Hitler and the Japanese, there came the days of peace: the hostilities were over. But while there was no longer enmity and no longer war, we in Britain were very hard up and still sorely rationed. With our tea coupons and clothing coupons and all the other coupons, we only had just enough to get through. The Hebrew word for peace doesn't mean simply the absence of hostility; it means the opposite of that second state of affairs and therefore it means peace and plenty, prosperity, abundance, well-being. Peace, the absence of strife. Peace in the sense of peace and plenty. Peace and abundance.

And then the Hebrew word *shalōm* has deeper meanings still. If one Israeli meets another Israeli in the street, to this very present day in Israel, he's likely to accost his friend with the Hebrew words, *Mah shalōmcha?* 'What is your peace?' And he doesn't mean, 'Have you just had a row with your wife or with your boss, and is it over now?' He means, 'How are you, are you well?' because peace means well-being, health, wholeness, integration. And, as referring to us and our personalities and to our bodies, it means health, peace of mind, peace of body, well-being, wholeness: the absence of distress and strife and internal disintegration.

It is not surprising therefore that when the Israelite brought this offering to the Lord, it not only secured for him forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and brought him into peace with God, where he ceased to be an enemy of God and no longer stood under the wrath of God, but it introduced him into well-being, into spiritual health and wholeness. It is reminiscent of the words of our Lord Jesus to those who, repenting of their sin, put their

faith in him. He often said to them, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace' or 'Your faith has made you whole. Go in peace.'

Fellowship

When we begin to explore what peace, and peace and plenty, and health and wholeness mean, we find in this great sacrifice that when the Israelite offered it, and offered the particular parts that he had to offer to God, God gave back to the offerer a large part of the sacrifice. It was, in symbol so to speak, as though God and man, now brought into fellowship one with another, feasted on the same sacrifice together and so enjoyed fellowship together. What a tremendous wholeness that is when, having been alienated and enemies in our mind by wicked works, we are brought back into fellowship with God, regaining our long-lost centre through faith in Jesus' blood.

When we come to the law of the offering, as we shall do on another occasion, we shall find that when the Israelite offered this sacrifice, not only did he get forgiveness and peace with God and fellowship with God, but as he was given back his part of the sacrifice to eat, certain regulations were laid upon him. He was obliged to summon his friends and invite them to take part of the meal along with him. They were interesting regulations. They didn't allow the man to go off in a corner and eat his piece of roast beef all by himself. They obliged him, as I say, to summon his family, to summon his friends, to summon the meek and to share with them the bounty that God had given him (see Ps 22:25–26). And so the man found integration at another level. Not only integration with God and fellowship with God, bringing peace to his heart and beginning to unite his own personality once more, but integration and fellowship with his fellow man.

Peace isn't just my sitting in a corner or in the broom cupboard in the dark and saying, 'Now I'm at peace here. There's nobody out there that can upset me. I've got myself on my island and all is well here. I've got plenty of provisions and bother the world. Let it go and if I keep on my little island, nobody can possibly come and destroy my peace.' That's how some people look at things. They'll have a shock when they get home to heaven! You'll not be able to do that in heaven. True peace means wholeness, and wholeness means fellowship. Fellowship with God and fellowship with our fellow redeemed men and women. Basing ourselves on the name of the sacrifice and on its function and usage, we come to think of it as it has been traditionally thought of—as the great peace offering.

Peace through the blood

For our preliminaries, we should notice the special features about this offering that are given us in chapter 3. When the offerer brought his sacrifice and it was offered to the Lord, as usual the blood was taken and was sprinkled on the altar all around, reminding us that, while it is called a peace offering and it leads to positive fellowship with the Lord, it is based on the shedding of blood. Before man could come into fellowship with God and enjoy all the bounty of fellowship with God, the peace and the plenty and the health and the new integration of his personality, the old question of sin and guilt, and the wrath of God against sin and guilt,

had to be dealt with and the penalty of disobedience paid. So there was peace in this ancient sacrifice—by blood.

Then I would have you notice that time and time again in our chapter, we read in the directions that all the fat of the animal had to be carefully cut away from the other flesh and taken and laid on the altar. The fat that was by the kidneys, the fat that was by the loins, the fat all around the caul, whatever that is, and if it was a sheep, then the great fat tail that could weigh a number of kilograms—all the fat was laid on the altar for God. These two features will be very much to the fore of our minds as we think of this great sacrifice.

A picture of Christ

So let's begin then, and as usual, the sacrifice points us to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. We think now of him, for he is our peace and, says the New Testament, 'he has made peace by the blood of his cross' (Col 1:20). Let the very fact that we need a sacrifice to make peace with God remind us of that perilous situation in which we once stood. Like Paul, I bid you to remember what you used to be, for a moment thinking on those dark days when you were away from God, so that the wonder of your salvation might take root in your heart again and you perceive once more the dimensions of this glorious peace into which Christ Jesus has brought you. Why did we need a sacrifice and the shedding of blood? Because, as Colossians puts it, we were 'in times past alienated and enemies in our mind by our evil works' (Col 1:21).

What a sorry condition for any human personality to be in—alienated from God. We lived in a world made by God. We were the creatures of God's hand. Our very breath was in his power. Yet for years we were estranged from God, alienated from God, living at a distance from God, not on speaking terms with God; or if we uttered a prayer or two now and again, it was but the formalities of a very distant acknowledgement. In our hearts, we had no active fellowship with God. We were estranged from him and for many of us, we didn't think very much of God either.

If challenged about our own way and our sins, we were resentful against God—says Scripture, we were positively enemies of God. It wasn't that we were engaged in lurid crime. It was that 'all we like sheep had gone astray: we had turned every one to his own way' (Isa 53:6). God could get on with his heaven, but we were going our own way and doing our own thing and enjoying ourselves, and God seemed to us to be a horrible wet blanket; the further we kept away from him, the better for our joy and our peace. Alienated and enemies in our mind by wicked works. What a terrible state it was. When we were in it, we didn't realise it so much as we realise now. To be a creature of God and yet to be alienated from him, at cross-purposes with him, going our own way, that's the beginning of a dissolution of our personality, isn't it? Had we gone on like that, our blessed Lord himself warns us what the inevitable result of such a situation would have been. In the end, we should have perished. Not ceased to exist—we should have existed somewhere forever. But as human beings that God designed, we should have ceased to be truly human, nothing but a jangle of powers and desires and motives, gone to pieces.

Sometimes as you roam the countryside, you come across an old thatched cottage. Well, that's what it was: you have to look twice now to see it was that. Once upon a time it had a beautiful thatched roof, painted windows and curtains, and a person inside. But now it has perished: it is no longer what it was designed to be. That was how we were—on our way to perish—alienated, enemies, disintegrating, lost. More serious than that, the Bible indicates that it was not merely us personally that were thus alienated from God. We had got caught up in a vast spirit of rebellion against God. The Bible does not give us details but gives us to understand that long before our world was made, there had broken out a rebellion in the very heavens themselves. So much so that the heavens are not clean in God's sight. It was the great 'anointed cherub that covereth' (see Ezek 28:14) who had lifted himself up to be as God, setting his will against the will of God. Eventually he involved and embroiled our little planet in his great rebellion and caused the fall of our race, and we came into this world all caught up in this great cosmic rebellion against God.

Not only going astray ourselves, but as the result of the fall of our human race, walking according to the prince of the power of the air and thinking the kind of thoughts that he put into our heads, we found ourselves broken men and women. Psychologically broken, spiritually broken, bodily broken. On top of all that, our conscience made us aware that our way of behaviour and our sins incurred and stood under the wrath of God, and the very thought of the wrath of God drove us further away from God. Like Adam and Eve, we tried to hide in the trees of the garden, away from a God whose presence now seemed to us to be a threat. What a sad and sorry story of human alienation from God, and therefore alienation from all that it means to be human. With the result that we live in a world which, instead of serving the harmonious purposes of its Creator, is all of a tangle, with ugly competition, vicious and murderous hate, and war and strife in abundance. Oh what a world ours has become.

And remember that you were like that, 'but now in Christ Jesus, you who were far-off have been brought near by the blood of Christ' (Eph 2:13). He is our peace and has made peace by the blood of his cross. Oh, the wonder of this simple story. The cross of Christ is the expression of human enmity against God: man wanting to go his own way and break free from God if he could. Yet God has made that same cross the means of causing our enmity to cease and making our peace with God. How did the cross of Christ do that? It has done it in part by changing what you think of God. It has made peace in that sense. You say, 'I was an enemy of God, for I entertained all sorts of foolish things about God. I was like Saul of Tarsus, I thought I ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth. I thought God was my enemy. I thought God was my persecutor. I thought he was a threat to me. I discovered in the cross of Christ that, while I was yet an enemy, God loved me and Christ died for me and it's changed what I think of God. I've been reconciled by the blood of his cross.' Oh yes, my friend, but it has done more than that.

There are some theologians who object if you say that God has been reconciled to us. They say, 'He was never your enemy really.' Well not in our normal sense, he wasn't. But it remains the fact that God in his holiness was wrathful, and rightly wrathful, against our sin. Before we could be reconciled to him, it wasn't merely necessary that we should change our opinion about God and repent of our hard thoughts about God, it was necessary that the

thing that stirred God's anger and wrath and displeasure against us be removed so that he might be able to accept us. The wonder of it is that God himself has found a sacrifice that removes his wrath against sin, because it pays the penalty and sets God free to welcome the repentant sinner. Oh, what a lovely thing. I know I tell you the very simplicities which you've known long since. But my brother, my sister, enjoy it now tonight, and enjoy it as you'll enjoy it eternally. He made peace by the blood of his cross and, being justified by faith, we have peace with God.

The richness of the offering

I want to tell you something more. You will have noticed how the details of the sacrifice said that when they had scattered the blood, the next thing they were to do was to take the fat of the animal and offer it on the altar. Of course, to have much fat the animal had to be a very healthy animal, brought up and tended by a very careful and wealthy farmer. I can imagine farmer Zephaniah standing by the altar there and looking on, and he doesn't mind who else looks too: he has brought this amazing bullock. He has fed it well and you can see the fat bulging on it. As he kills it and cuts it into bits, here comes a great piece of fat: this will make the fires on the altar blaze; and there's fat there and more fat here. No skinny old, bony thing this—a beautiful bullock, healthy, full of fat and rich, and the wealth of it goes on the altar.

The ancients valued fat in that sense. When they wanted to speak about riches, they used the word 'fat' metaphorically. They would talk about the fat of your wine or the fat of your barley or the fat of your corn. They meant the richest part of it. Stand with old farmer Zephaniah by the altar as he's offering his peace offering, and all these great chunks of fat and all their richness go on the altar. The flame darts up and consumes the burnt offering, and farmer Zephaniah is very pleased and very proud.

You can talk about bullocks all you like and the wealth of it and the richness of it. But with all due reverence, I bid you stand by Calvary's sacrifice and look on it. Let the Holy Spirit tell you its wealth. Who is this who has made peace by the blood of his cross? My brother, my sister, see the wealth of it, for holy writ says that in him was all fullness pleased to dwell. Can you perceive the wealth of this sacrifice? He who was rich beyond all computation; and God has given him to make peace for us poverty-stricken human beings. 'We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.' Whose blood? You put that question to Paul and he'll tell you, 'You have redemption through his blood who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him and through him and to him, were all things made' (see Col 1:14–16). Oh, the wealth of this great sacrifice by which our peace is made: ponder the significance. All creation was made for him and we had the impertinence to go against him, to go our own way; and in his grace, he took his wealth and laid it on the altar and became poor. Oh how poor.

I see that bullock that a minute ago had been standing all glistening; the farmer had brushed its coat, like they do for a prize show, and brought him to the house of the Lord, fat and healthy. Now an hour later, dismembered, and the fat on the altar had gone to ashes and nothing. And then I think how God spared not his own Son but gave him to die. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor. Can you measure it? The riches of the one for

whom all things were made, and the poverty of him who hung in darkness, rejected of men and forsaken of God—‘that we through his poverty might be made rich’ (2 Cor 8:9). In a moment we shall begin to think about it, but let it suffice for now that having made peace by the blood of his cross, now through Christ’s work, we’re reconciled to the Father and we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But I want just for a moment to turn aside and look in a little bit more detail at the instructions for this sacrifice. We have been noticing in our previous studies that as the Israelite drew near to God and felt his need of forgiveness and cleansing, God pointed him to a sacrifice and assured the good man that when the sacrifice was offered, it met his need completely; and we were reminded how the sacrifice of Christ meets our need. But then we’ve been noticing more. We not only see that the sacrifice of Christ meets our need, but God points us to details about that sacrifice. So just as in the offering, when they cut it up, they inspected it and looked at the parts and saw that they were all perfect and fit to be sacrificed, so now the Holy Spirit points us to the Lord Jesus and says, ‘Do you know how it is that he was qualified to be your sacrifice?’ The answer is that where you failed, he was perfect.

We’re going to look at that now and I shall have to be poking around in your kidneys, if you don’t mind! So sit relaxed just a little while, because I’ve got to talk to you about your kidneys and other such parts—the loins and the caul, which is above the liver. Don’t get too alarmed. I warned you last Thursday how the Hebrews, when they came to talk about psychological states, based their phrases on the physical parts of the body. So even the New Testament says ‘I long after you in the bowels of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 1:8 KJV), meaning the tender affection of Jesus Christ. And again in the New Testament the Lord Jesus says, ‘I am the Lord. I search the kidneys’ (Rev 2:23)—the reins and the heart, meaning those hidden desires and motives within us. Or again, the holy Scripture says ‘Is your eye evil?’ (Matt 20:15)—‘eye’ meaning our envy. Or the Hebrew for anger, or at least one of the words for anger in Hebrew, is ‘nostril’. If you want to understand that, watch somebody who’s losing his temper and getting very angry. If you should have the misfortune to see somebody like that, watch his nose!

The Hebrews, being a simple people, when they talked of psychological states, used as metaphors the terms of the body and that’s how we’re going to use these terms. How was it that we became so wretchedly poor and alienated and lacked peace? And how was it that he was so perfect and able to be our sacrifice? I want you to notice particularly the word that is used. They had to take the fat by the kidneys and the fat that was over the kidneys by the loins. You notice that word ‘loin’? The Hebrew for it is *kesel* and it is a very interesting word because it has all sorts of connotations. It means basically something that is plump and hence it is used of the loins or flanks of animals, particularly healthy animals; and then the Hebrews used it metaphorically. I suppose they’d observed that some very, very fat people—not anybody here tonight!—tend to be a little bit flaccid and slow maybe, and a little bit credulous. So this word ‘flank’ and its cognate words came to indicate people that are a little bit stupid and credulous.

And then, interestingly enough, the word had another side to it, where it took to the good instead of the bad; and from meaning credulous in the bad sense, it came to mean

somebody who has confidence in the good sense. You will find usages in Job and in the psalms, where this word is used in the highest and the very best sense of 'confidence'. 'If I have made gold my flank' says Job, 'then let God's judgment come upon me' (see Job 31:24–28). For he protests, 'I have not put my confidence in money. My confidence has always been in God and if I have put my confidence falsely in money, then let God judge me.' *Kesel* is the word he used and we're going to think of the matter of confidence.

Confidence in God

How are your loins getting on? According to holy Scripture, that's where a lot of the trouble started—in the realm of our confidence and in the realm of our kidneys. In Old Testament and New Testament usage, kidneys talked to us of our hidden desires and our hidden motives: 'I, the Lord, search the kidneys'. And perhaps the Hebrews weren't altogether silly talking about the kidneys as the seat of desire, because modern medicine tells us that the kidneys are where the adrenalins are placed, and all that they do to us.

Come with me to the garden of Eden itself; and here are man and woman, with all the bounty of God around them on every hand. Delightful trees, delightful fruits: everything is glorious, the love gift of God to them; and on top of it all, fellowship with God. Then here comes Satan, and watch him get at the kidneys and watch him get at the loins. He's wanting to involve mankind in his dastardly rebellion against God, and the very first thing he does is to try and undermine Eve's confidence in God. 'My dear,' he says, 'I hear you can't eat of any of these trees around here. Shame, you know, really.'

'Oh, no,' says Eve, 'we can eat of any of these trees we like, except one.'

'Ah, yes. I knew there was one.'

'Well, God has said that in the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die.'

'Yes, I know,' says his satanic majesty. 'You see, that's just like God. Actually you won't die at all if you eat of the tree, but that's just like God. God knows that in the day you eat thereof, you shall surely be as God. That's just like God: he loves to keep you down. He loves to withhold things from you. Eve, my dear, open your eyes and look. Oh, what a splendid time you could have, if only you didn't have regard to God's word. What a killjoy he is. Oh, what joy you could have. How you could rise in his universe if you just took no notice of God and his word and followed your own desire. Look at that tree.'

And Eve started to look. Well, it was good to look at and it satisfied her aesthetic desires. Then she saw it was good for food and that satisfied her physical desires. And she saw it was desirable to make one wise and that appealed to her intellect and her intellectual desires.

'There, my dear,' said Satan, 'that's life for you. Set alight your desires, good woman. You're not here for very long. Satisfy yourself, enjoy yourself. Physical desire, aesthetic desire, intellectual desire. That's life, my dear good woman. Bother God and his word.'

And in that moment, all Eve's spiritual constitution was unhinged, as first Satan destroyed Eve's confidence in God—she daren't trust him anymore—and then misdirected her kidneys, her desires.

Haven't we known enough of his satanic majesty's attentions to know that he's wounded us in those two regions of our personality? My dear sister, my dear brother, even since you have known the Lord, have you never had Satan whispering in your ears when life has been difficult: 'God could do better for you than this, couldn't he?' 'Does God really love you?' Yes, lack of confidence in God, lack of trust in the love of God. In consequence, Satan took the world and all its lovely things that were meant to draw man's heart nearer to God and into fellowship with God, and used them to draw man's heart away from God.

Now what happened? Watch it in the world outside; and such were some of us once. As John puts it, 'The desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the pride of life' (1 John 2:16). Going in for this world as if this world were everything, and leaving God out of the question. In the end, that's the way to poverty and perdition. What a sorry thing. You remember the story in John 6, when our Lord had done a miracle and turned the bread and the fish into enough to feed the multitude. Next day, the crowd came: they wanted the bread and they wanted the fish. They hadn't had eyes to see who Jesus was. They didn't really want him as Son of God. Like a girl with a beautiful engagement ring, but she isn't interested in the fellow who gave the ring to her—she's only interested in the ring. Men and women live for the beautiful world around us and they're not interested in the God who gave it. They've no confidence in that God. Oh, what a miserable plight we were in. And now let me point you to the blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

See him at the beginning of his ministry in the wilderness, and he fasted forty days, and still God hadn't given him the word to make any stones into bread. There came the tempter and said, 'If you are the Son of God, make this stone bread.' 'No,' said Christ, 'man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' (Matt 4:3-4). He would dare trust God for his daily bread and butter. And see him at the end when they nailed him on a cross. And they walked by, saying, 'There you are. He trusted in God. Let God deliver him if he delights in him' (Matt 27:43). Perhaps in all those terrors that came upon Christ, this was not the least. After a life of trust in God, man mocked him with that trust. It was in those dark hours that our blessed Lord was heard repeating the words from Psalm 22,

Oh, my God, why did you forsake me? Our fathers trusted in thee, they cried to thee and they were not ashamed. You answered their prayers. I cry and thou answered not. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. (Ps 22:1-2, 4-5, 10)

Every minute of every day he had walked in utter dependence and trust in God and now when he cried, God didn't answer. And then comes our Lord's reply, 'Oh, but you are holy' (v. 3) And he died in absolute, unshaken faith. I tell you, my brothers and sisters in those moments the whole universe was kept together. To think the unthinkable, if in that moment Christ's faith in God had broken, the whole universe would have gone apart. I say it reverently, the faith of our blessed Lord Jesus was utterly unbroken; he is the author and finisher of faith. And you're saved and there is a heaven, because of our blessed Lord and his unshaken faith in God.

Oh, the wonder of it, and here we begin to perceive what God must be like. For we watch him in the Upper Room, where now the shades of Gethsemane and Calvary were fast

spreading across his sky and he was going out to the tortures of Calvary. As holy writ says, they sang a hymn and he said to his apostles, 'But that the world may know that I love the Father . . . Come, let's go' (John 14:31). They went, singing. I say to myself, if he could love God like that, if he could trust God like that, what a God God must be. So we are saved, reconciled, not through some puny effort of our own, but by the great sacrifice of Christ, and we worship one so perfect that he was able to be that sacrifice.

Now let us think for a few closing moments. Not only are we forgiven and reconciled, but we are brought into fellowship with God—let your mind run for a moment on those multitudinous Scriptures. We can only refer to them that tell us of the wealth of our fellowship with God. See that offerer now, as the fat is on the fire, and God gives him back the major portion of the beast and he takes it with him and makes a feast for himself and his friends and his family and God, and he and his friends sit down at this meal together.

Says John, as he impresses upon us what it means to have eternal life,

This is that life eternal that was with the Father and has been manifested, and we have seen and we actually touched him when he was here in the days of his flesh, and we write these things to you so that you can have fellowship with us, and we with God and with the Father and with his Son. (1 John 1:1–3)

Sharing in the very life of God—this is what we symbolise as we come to celebrate the Lord's Supper and sit spiritually, wherever we are, at his table; and we think how the wine is a fellowship in the very blood of Christ, and the bread a fellowship in his body.

Making us whole

But now it is God's good pleasure to make us like the Lord Jesus. So finally let me come back to the question of making men whole. What is God doing? Well, first of all, he gives us peace with God, says Scripture. Whereas before, we had no peace with God, we feared the wrath of God, we stood under the wrath of God, our conscience and inner man were depressed by a sense of guilt that ever and again would recur and would eventually have destroyed our personalities and quite ruined them. But now it's gone: thank God, we've peace with God. Not peace with ourselves maybe, but peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The very fundamental of rebuilding our personality is peace with God.

'And now listen,' says Paul. 'You've peace with God through Jesus Christ his Son, then watch what God is doing with your confidence.' For if we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, then we can have confidence in hope of the glory of God. I'm now free from guilt, but God in his mercy is beginning to make me again and renew my confidence. You see, my confidence is the absolute centre of my personality and being. If I'm going to cohere together I shall need a strong confidence, and a confidence put in a place that will never let me down. That is what Christ is beginning to do for you, my brother and sister. Oh, what a lovely thing. Have you got that confidence? Have you got that assurance of salvation?

Peace with God and now this—you may boast in hope of the glory of God. The word doesn't mean 'boast' in the foolish sense of pride. It means boast in the sense of exaltation, of

confidence, of glorying in it. Where is your confidence to face life with, to face eternity with? You say, 'It's confidence in God, in the sacrifice of Christ. And though I am far from perfect, I can have confidence here and now that I shall attain the glory of God.' What a wonderful thing: God is telling you the end before you reach it!

My dear good friends, however marred you are, however broken as a personality, however plagued with fears and doubts and uncertainties, however torn your inner being, if you are Christ's, God is in process of renewing it. Peace with God and now confidence. Do you know, in my old age, I find talking to my fellow believers that there are a surprising number who in their heart of hearts miss assurance of salvation, and it's such a pity. It's more than a theological doctrine, you know. This is the beginning of the rebuilding of a saved personality—confidence. Confidence that one day you're going to be like Christ. Yes, you're going to be made all glorious, not only in body, but in personality. You shall attain the glory of God, confident that you shall never come under the wrath of God; that you will be saved from the wrath of God. Absolute confidence—thus does God rebuild our personalities.

Therefore, let Scripture warn us finally, lest we put our confidence in the wrong things. Religion is a past master at misdirecting people's confidence and therefore Paul is heard saying in Galatians 6:14, 'God forbid that I should have confidence save in the cross of Jesus Christ, my Lord.' My confidence is not in religious ritual, in circumcision, in the keeping of the law. My confidence lies solely in the cross of Christ. Hear this word from Paul to the Corinthians, 'My dear fellow Corinthians, what is happening to your confidence? You're beginning to call yourselves after men, saying, "I am of Paul. I am of Peter. I am of Apollos." That won't do: that's misplaced confidence. Paul wasn't crucified for you. You surely weren't baptised in the name of Paul, were you?' (see 1 Cor 1:12–13). Moreover, listen to what God says, 'Let not the rich man boast in his riches. Let not the wise man put his confidence in his wisdom, but he who has confidence, let him put his confidence in the Lord, for of God it is that you are in Christ Jesus, who is made unto us wisdom, sanctification and redemption' (1 Cor 1:30–31). And as I hear that word, it thrills my heart and boosts my confidence.

You are in Christ tonight. My brother, my sister, tell me, how did you get in Christ? You say, 'There came a very clever preacher. I'd never heard any preacher like him before. He could read the Bible, shut the Bible and never look at his notes, and preach a marvellous message, and he convinced me, and so I'm a Christian.' Is that how you're in Christ? Poor old you. One of these days, another preacher will come. He'll be a bit more eloquent. He might take you out of Christ. I should be a bit jittery if I thought that some preacher put me in Christ. No, listen: it is of God that you are in Christ Jesus. He put you in, and God it is that makes Christ to be for you that surpassing wealth, wisdom, sanctification and redemption. This was the offering full of fat and riches. He who was rich became poor for your sakes that you, through his poverty, are made rich. Now you're in Christ, my brother, my sister, let God tell you, 'In him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily' (Col 2:9). In him are all the riches and treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In Christ, you are made full. The Lord fix our hearts upon his blessed Son and fill our hearts with joy and confidence, for his name's sake.

The Stain of Sin

Let's begin this study by reading from Leviticus 4.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any one shall sin unwittingly, in any of the things which the LORD hath commanded not to be done, and shall do any one of them: if the anointed priest shall sin so as to bring guilt on the people; then let him offer for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering. And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tent of meeting before the LORD; and he shall lay his hand upon the head of the bullock, and kill the bullock before the LORD. And the anointed priest shall take of the blood of the bullock and bring it to the tent of meeting: and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the LORD, before the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the LORD, which is in the tent of meeting; and all the blood of the bullock shall he pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the door of the tent of meeting. And all the fat of the bullock of the sin offering he shall take off from it; the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, which is by the loins, and the caul upon the liver with the kidneys, shall he take away, as it is taken off from the ox of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall burn them upon the altar of burnt offering. And the skin of the bullock, and all its flesh, with its head, and with its legs, and its inwards, and its dung, even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall it be burnt. And if the whole congregation of Israel shall err . . . (vv. 1–13)

When a ruler sinneth, and doeth unwittingly any one of all the things which the LORD his God hath commanded not to be done . . . (v. 22)

And if any one of the common people sin unwittingly . . . (v. 27)

And if any one sin, in that he heareth the voice of adjuration . . . (5:1)

The attentive reader will notice the refrain that rings through these two chapters of holy writ—'if anyone sin', what happens? We have more than an academic interest in that question. It is one of life's main questions, particularly for a believer in the Lord Jesus, and so let us turn now, just for a moment, and read a Scripture in the New Testament that raises that same question and answers it in Christian terms.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for

our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. And hereby know we that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (1 John 2:1-3)

It will help us if we read one or two other Scriptures in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:13-14)

And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission. It was necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. (9:22-23)

We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest *as an offering* for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after *the city* which is to come. (13:10-14)

And may God give us good understanding of his holy Word.

The Sin Offering

In the course of our study of the ancient Jewish sacrificial system, we come tonight to the fourth major sacrifice, called in Scripture the sin offering. This one will perhaps be a little bit easier for us to follow and understand than the one with which we toiled last Thursday evening. For here, we are plainly told, is the sacrifice for sin. If an Israelite sinned against the Lord, whoever he was, he could come and offer this sacrifice and so find cleansing of his sins. It points us immediately to Jesus Christ our Lord, 'who died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; was buried and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor 15:3-4). It points us to him of whom it is said that 'he bore our sins in his body on the tree' (1 Pet 2:24). 'He was made sin for us, he who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' (2 Cor 5:21).

From the very beginning, therefore, as we enter the main door of this particular chapter of Scripture, it promises us all sorts of glorious things and things comfortable and encouraging. It tells us of our blessed Lord, who died for our sins.

He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by his precious blood.³

³ Mrs C. F. Alexander (1818-95), 'There is a Green Hill' (1848).

If we had any doubt as to whether it is legitimate to use these ancient sacrifices as pointers to the sacrifice of Christ, that doubt would be removed for us because the last passage we read from Hebrews 13 explicitly refers to the paragraph we read in Leviticus 4, where we were told that with certain sacrifices for sin, the high priest was to take the blood of the sacrifice and bring it into the Holy Place, sprinkle it within the veil in the presence of God and smear it on the horns of the altar of incense. And then the body of that animal whose blood was used to cleanse the tabernacle was taken outside the gate of the tabernacle court, outside the camp of Israel's dwelling, outside to a clean place where the ashes are poured out, and there the body was burned with fire, outside the gate and outside the camp. The Holy Spirit, in Hebrews 13, explicitly recalls that sacrifice to our minds, because he wishes to draw a very vivid comparison between it and the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, and so he says that Jesus likewise, that he might sanctify the people with his blood, suffered outside the gate and outside the camp of Israel's Judaism (see Heb 13:12).

The two 'non-sweet savour' sacrifices

So then we take this sacrifice as a picture of our Lord Jesus and his sacrifice for sin. If we wanted to sketch in a few more details and get ourselves orientated, we could observe that this sacrifice in Leviticus 4 now introduces us to two sacrifices that many theologians call 'non-sweet savour' sacrifices. That sounds horribly off-putting, but what they mean is this: it is explicitly said of the first three sacrifices—the burnt offering, the meal offering and the peace offering—that when the priest offered all the appropriate parts upon the altar, there went up to God a soothing aroma that gratified the very heart of God. Therefore, the theologians tell us that we should see in those wonderful sacrifices something that our selfish hearts sometimes forget.

We are so absorbed with the fact that 'Christ died for me'—and it is of course so important to know that Christ died for us—that sometimes we forget that when he died, he wasn't just dying in our interest: he was dying in God's interest. He was offering himself to God; and that sacrifice of total and complete obedience on the part of Christ went up to God as something exceedingly and immeasurably delightful. It will never cease to charm the heart of God: as one writer put it, 'God is satisfied with Jesus.' In consequence, I can add meaningfully, 'and I am satisfied as well'.

But when we come to this sin offering, say some of the theologians, you will see a different emphasis. Now it is not said that these sacrifices go up as a sweet smelling savour to God. For these sacrifices are going to talk to us about that awful thing that happened when Christ was made sin on our behalf and was forsaken of God, and cried in the desolation and dereliction of his heart,

Oh my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou answerest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. (Ps 22:2)

Why this awful silence and why the darkness? Here are sacrifices then which point us to that other side of the work of our blessed Lord. Shall we ever forget it, even when heaven proves more dazzling than we expected? Amidst all the dazzling glories of that heavenly

place, we shall not forget the darkness that came across the whole earth when Jesus Christ, that he might sanctify us with his blood, suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem on Golgotha's hill.

Here are two sacrifices then. They are called, technically, the sin offering and then the trespass offering, in our English translations. They deal with this other side of the work of Christ. Even so, we should just check up on the theologians: it's always a wise thing to do. They're not quite right, you know, to say that this sin offering was never a sweet smell of a sacrifice and savour to God. For when you look at Leviticus 4:31, which is describing the sin offering for the common people, you will note that it says, 'All the fat thereof he shall take away, as the fat is taken away from off the sacrifice of peace offering, and the priest shall burn it upon the altar'—listen to what it says—'for a sweet savour unto the Lord'. Yes, good to check up on the theologians! It is the fact, let's grant them that, that there are these two major sides to the work of Christ: the one in which he offered himself without spot to God, to the very delight of God's heart; and the other when he bore our sin and the face of God had to be averted from him.

It is true in general, if you look at the gospels in the New Testament. Two of those gospels, Matthew and Mark, record that when our Lord died, there came that great darkness and he cried in the bitterness of his heart, the cry of desolation, 'Why have you forsaken me?' The two other gospels record the story of the cross, but they don't mention the cry of dereliction. They are Luke, who's telling us about our Lord who made peace by his death; and John, who's telling us of him who did the will of God perfectly and offered himself as a burnt offering to God. The glorious thing, my dear brother and sister, is this: even in those dark moments when God, as the universal judge of all mankind, had to bruise him and put him to grief for our sins, and turned his holy face away from that terrible scene, yet—you'd scarce believe it unless God told you—when Jesus Christ died for my sin, God was pleased with it. 'Therefore does my Father love me that I lay down my life for the sheep' (see John 10:17). My brother, my sister, just for a moment take it in, if you possibly can. Jesus Christ laid down his life for you. Just you imagine it; and that God loves him for doing it, and will love him for eternity that he laid down his life for you.

Distinguishing burnt offering and sin offering

If we check up on these theologians a little bit more, we shall observe that when they say that the burnt offering is the chiefest of all the offerings, they're perfectly correct, and it went up to God for an offering of a sweet smelling savour. We saw in our study that the great burnt offering sacrifice of chapter 1 was offered to make atonement: it was an offering for sin. We are dealing tonight, in chapter 4, with the sin offering and it points to the fact that the Lord Jesus died for our sins. So we face the inevitable question. If the burnt offering also was offered to make atonement for sin, and chapter 1 says it explicitly—it was offered as a ransom for sin—what is the difference between the burnt offering and this sin offering? Why did we need two offerings to effect a ransom for sin?

We shall notice tonight that the sin offering is concerned with the stain of sin. And because it is concerned with the stain of sin, this is the sacrifice which, pre-eminently above

all sacrifices, concentrates our thought on the blood of the sacrifice. As one means of checking on our understanding of these sacrifices it is useful to notice the occurrence of that little word 'all' which is exceedingly significant. In the case of the burnt offering it says, 'you shall offer *all* of it on the altar' without reserve. It speaks of the devotion of Christ, who loved the Lord, his God, with all his heart, mind, soul and strength, and his neighbour as himself. In the meal offering, the priest was to take a handful of the oil and a handful of the flour and offer it on the altar with *all* the incense. The incense was regarded as being totally for God, whereas the rest of the sacrifice was given back to the priest, telling us that there are things about the person of our Lord Jesus that are solely understood by God and for God only. 'No man knows the Son save the Father' (Matt 11:27), says holy Scripture. In the peace offering, it was not the whole offering offered, nor all the frankincense. What we noticed last week was that when they offered the peace offering, *all* the fat had to go to God. The fat was the very best of that sacrifice and we saw all sorts of significance in the parts of the body from which that fat was taken.

The cleansing blood

Now we come to the sin offering, and where will it place the little word 'all'? Just here, 'You shall take the blood, you shall sprinkle some before the veil and on it, some you shall smear on the horns of the altar of incense, and you shall come out to the altar and you shall pour *all* the blood' (v. 7). Tonight, therefore, we are to think very much about the blood of this sacrifice and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle John tells us that 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin' (1 John 1:7). And with inspired insight into the accuracy of the Old Testament, the writer to the Hebrews picks up the idea. He says, 'My fellow Christians, have you not noticed that under the law, almost all things are cleansed by blood?' (see Heb 9:22). Under the law, the very tabernacle of God had to be cleansed. It was cleansed by blood. As the priest took the blood of the sacrifice into the Holy Place and he sprinkled it on the veil and he sprinkled it and smeared it on the horns of the altar, why was he doing that? In Leviticus 16, God says, 'You must bring the blood into the Holy Place on the Day of Atonement, into the holiest of all. You must make atonement for the tabernacle and you shall cleanse the tabernacle that remains among my people in all their uncleanness.'

And now the Holy Spirit is beginning to set the practical scene. Why did they need a sin offering? They needed a sin offering to deal with this particular aspect of sin—the fact that sin stains. I don't how you felt as we read that constantly repeated refrain in chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5, 'Speak unto Israel and say unto them, "If any man sin', 'if a ruler sin', 'if the priest that is anointed sin', 'if any one of the common people sin', 'if the whole congregation sin'. What a plague the whole business is. We prick up our ears. We recognise how practical the problem is. What happens if a man sins? Is that a problem for you? Well thank God if it is. For all I know, it didn't used to be. There were days when some of you didn't care what happened if a man sinned. What's made the difference? Precisely because you've trusted the Saviour and you say, 'I have eternal forgiveness of sins in Christ.' Marvellous!

What are you worried about then? You say, 'Believers shouldn't sin, should they? But alas, I've gone and sinned. What now happens if, as a believer, I sin?' That's a very big point, isn't it? I am delighted to see that that worries you: that's a very healthy sign on the whole. It will be a bad day, my brother, my sister, if you weren't concerned to know what the answer to that question is. But you already know the answer. We live and die by this marvellous truth: 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:7, 9). You say to me, 'I shall go home to glory at last, forgetting a lot of my theology and all about Ezekiel, and as I lie on my death bed I shall be saying to myself, "Herein is all my hope. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses me from all sin."'

You say, 'I'm glad I'm a Christian, because when I sin, I don't have to bring another sacrifice like those Israelites when they sinned. The thing was endless: they always had to keep bringing another sacrifice. As a Christian, how favoured I am. I don't have to bring another sacrifice because Christ offered himself once and for all to cover my sin.' As Hebrews 10 explains, not only is there now no longer any more sacrifice, there is no more offering (see Heb 10:18).

The stain of sin

You don't have to keep offering another sacrifice, so it's all finished—you think. Have you had anybody object to that? 'It is rather easy for you Christians: after all it doesn't really matter much if you sin because it's all been paid for, so I suppose you can go out and carry on sinning.' How do you explain that kind of thing to your non-Christian friends? But it doesn't work that way round, does it? The fact that I know my sins are forgiven doesn't mean that I grow careless about sin. You sit here tonight, knowing that all your sins are forgiven and that you are right with God; you shall never come into the wrath of God. And yet when you sin, my brother, my sister, you are concerned, aren't you? 'What happens if I sin as a believer?' I can tell you what happens. It stains you: it defiles your conscience.

Listen to Paul discussing with his fellow believers at Corinth the question of what foods they should eat or not eat, and whether they could eat things sacrificed to idols or not. And Paul is learnedly explaining all the technical information that lies behind the answer and he says, 'But you'll have to go very carefully with some of your fellow believers, because they haven't got all the knowledge that you have, and if you were to persuade them to eat something offered to idols, they'd do it because you made them do it. But they'd still have a bad conscience about it, you know. And if they do something with a bad conscience, their conscience, being weak, is defiled' (1 Cor 8:7). Yes, the stain of sin; and you imagine the solemnity of it.

Here was a transcendent Lord, come down to dwell amongst his people. He'd redeemed them out of Egypt, he'd come to dwell among them. Here he was inviting them to approach his presence, to come and get to know him and to serve him. See the remarkable train of his glory and the glitter and the gold and the blue and the purple, telling us of the beauty of his holiness and the awesomeness of his holiness. And here's an Israelite and he's on his way, on the Sabbath maybe, to come with the rest of the congregation to the tent of meeting to

have fellowship with God. And at breakfast time, he had a little tiff with his wife over the cornflakes or something, and before you knew where you were, there were angry words over the table. Then followed that uncomfortable kind of a feeling: 'I was wrong there. I lost my temper again, selfish man that I am. And now I've got to go and worship the Lord.' What's wrong? Well, it's defiled your conscience, hasn't it, and as a believer you don't feel too good about it. You wouldn't mind going and digging the garden for the Lord, but to come into the divine presence and give out the hymns . . . sin has stained you. What then?

Listen to the exact phraseology of Hebrews 9. The writer is talking to his fellow believers, and he says, 'If the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer sanctify to the cleansing of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works . . .' So that I can go to heaven? No, no. 'Purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God' (Heb 9:13-14). We are under obligation, my brother, my sister, to serve the living God; to serve him in our worship, in our praise, to serve him in our actions. He has called us, he has summoned us to come and worship. Oh, thank God for the provision he has made for his failing people, whose consciences get stained. Listen to it again, 'how much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' This is not to make light of sin, as we shall see in a moment, but hear his gospel message.

Think of another Sunday, when you didn't fall out with your wife, and you were feeling very pleased with yourself because the day before, you held witness for the Lord very courageously. And in fact this morning you'd been solemnly reading the Bible before coming out to the meeting: that ought to count for something. And so as you came into the presence of the Lord, the Lord said, 'Lovely to see you. I accept you, because you are such a sterling, good witness.' Did he? Oh, my brother, my sister, so you might have felt. But if only we could see ourselves as God sees us in the very best of our service: stained still with sin. In the moment of our greatest spiritual success, we come to serve God in his presence solely on the basis of the blood of Christ. We come as our Lord exhorted us, after we have done all our toil and the best we can do, and we cry, 'We are unprofitable servants still.' What else can we say? We've left undone the things we should have done and done things that we shouldn't have done. At best we've only done our duty and we come always, and never otherwise, solely on the basis of the blood of Christ. But see its value, how much more cleansing us to serve.

A priest's sacrifice

Now let us observe the priest as he brings his sacrifice. And here we might pause to notice that there were several grades of this sacrifice, according to whether the man who had sinned was a priest or a commoner or a ruler, or that it was the whole congregation. Tonight we are going to confine ourselves to the offering that was offered by the priest, 'if the anointed priest shall sin' (4:3). It is true that in Israel all priests were anointed. It is conceivable that on this occasion the priest concerned was the high priest and therefore is dignified with this title, but that won't serve us very well, because our high priest never did sin. That's the difference between him and Israel's high priest. The parallel will do very well for us who are ordinary

priests. Aren't you an anointed priest? Of course you are: all believers are anointed priests. And we're going to follow what happened in Israel when an anointed priest sinned and we shall notice this—it involved that man in a journey, in a pilgrimage.

Let me go over its stages briefly. He was told he had to bring his sacrifice to the door of the tent of meeting and kill it by the altar. So there he was in the big court of the tabernacle with its linen curtains around and there, standing out prominent, is the big altar and he comes there and brings his sacrifice and there it is killed. Then he is told that the very next thing he is to do is to take the blood and go into the tabernacle, into the Holy Place, right up to the veil and sprinkle the blood on that veil.

That's quite a journey in itself, and having done that he turns round and, as he begins to come out again, he takes some of the blood and he smears it on the horns of the incense altar that is standing in front of that veil. Now he's begun his journey back. And then, says the Holy Spirit, 'When you get outside now, you shall take the blood, that is all the rest of the blood, and you shall pour it at the base of the altar.' So now he's come back to where he started from. Not a bad thing to do sometimes. Even so, his journey isn't finished, 'And now,' says God, 'you shall carry the beast itself—its body apart from the fat—outside the gate, outside the camp to a clean place where the ashes are poured out, and there shall you burn it.'

It involves the priest in a journey. Let's follow him in his journey very briefly and see what he saw, and see whether it means anything to us. 'If any man sin'—you say, 'Father, I'm covered by the blood of Christ: how much more shall that blood cleanse my conscience. And I come now into the presence of God.' So you do, my brother, my sister. You're welcome to come; and God takes your hand and says, 'Come with me, my child, come and stand here a moment by this altar.' And here it comes, half-skipping, half reluctant, a young bullock. Interesting, isn't it, because in the other sacrifices they were bullocks, and whether they were male or female was important, and of course they had to be without blemish. Now, for the first time, we read it had to be a young bullock, and says God, 'You shall kill it.' Not offer it, kill it. What a vivid picture.

I was a farmer's boy at one stage in my career. For four years—that is my sum total of knowledge about these things—I used to watch the young bullocks when they were let out. They jumped and they pranced; they couldn't keep still two seconds at a time for the sheer joy of living. Really full of life and energy, not always knowing what to do with it. Very much alive. 'You shall take a young bullock and kill it'. When an elderly person comes to ninety-three-and-a-half, and death comes, in one sense it's a sad result of the fall; but then in another sense, as the Bible would put it, they're like a sheaf of ripe corn and it's an end to their aches and pains and their troubles and their trials. We're not always altogether sorry, certainly not for them, that they go.

Take a young woman of seventeen, full of life, and some terrible thug, some maniac, takes a knife and plunges it in her jugular vein, and you're horrified at that young life so thrown away. 'Come and stand here,' says God, 'and see him whom your sin killed.'

'He who would love long life and see good days, let him keep his mouth from speaking guile' (Ps 34:12–13). Our Lord had done this. They tell us he was about thirty-three when he died, in the full bloom of sinless manhood. What a ghastly murderer sin is. It took that

lovely young life and killed it. You know, there is a temptation that assails us sometimes, particularly as younger folks, that a little bit of sin, as long as you're discriminating, can add a little zest to life; make life a bit more interesting, help you to get more out of life. But that's a lie and a delusion. Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. 'Stand there and kill it before the Lord'—with the eye of God consciously upon you and you confessing yourself that you're responsible for this thing.

I had a distant relative at one stage. He was out on a farm, shooting with his young friend. He didn't intend to do it, but accidentally the gun went off, because he mishandled it, and it shot his young friend. You imagine what the boy felt like when he had to come and stand in front of the parents whose child he'd killed. What do you say? If any man sin, we have an advocate; the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. 'So it does,' says God, 'but come now and stand with me at Calvary awhile; stand with my eye upon you and see your sin kill my Son.' And after that, we don't sin quite so regularly again, do we?

Staying near to God

'When it is done, take the blood,' says God, 'and bring it into the Holy Place and sprinkle it on the veil.' Now that's a lovely thing, for you see, the priest couldn't go into the Most Holy, except once a year on the Day of Atonement. The innermost part of the tabernacle he could go to on ordinary days in the year was up to and as far as the veil. That's as near to God as he was allowed to come in those far-off days; and do you see what God is saying? 'Come, fresh from the altar, and come right into my presence, as near to me as you can ever possibly be allowed to come on earth. Come and stand by the veil.'

I have taken comfort over many years, to learn that little fact. When I have sinned at times—and you know what sin does to a believer: it smudges his conscience and makes him feel bad—and I have had the feeling that perhaps I'd better stay at a little distance for a while. It wouldn't be too good to come right into the presence of God just too quickly. How stupid I am. Here's a chap and he's fallen out with his brother and they've had loud words and they've gone off in a huff. After it's died down, they've felt better about it, but they don't immediately go out for a walk together. They feel, 'Well perhaps we'll keep away for a week or two and then perhaps we'll just meet casually, perhaps at church, and then we'll come back gradually when the old feeling has gone off a bit.'

Do you know I used to feel like that about God? What a stupid notion. No, my brother, my sister, if you've sinned, you're not safe to stay at a distance. Says God, 'Come here, come right in, come as near to me as you can get. That's the safest place for you. Come and stand here.' Did you sin just this afternoon and in genuine repentance you have confessed it to the Lord? You can come and stand in the very holiest of all. It's the safest place you could possibly come and stand. Don't stay away, will you? Men and women have made grievous mistakes: they've failed, they've fallen down, they've blotted their copybook and they feel so ashamed of themselves that they've gone away from the Lord. They didn't feel good enough to stay. And being away from the Lord, they've lost their Christian joy, and losing their Christian joy, they've lost heart and they say, 'Well what's the good of me pretending to be anything?' and they've gone further into sin. Oh, dear friend, the opposite is true: because of

the blood of Christ, the moment you confess that sin, you come right in, bad as you may think.

Walking in the light

But notice what it means, for to come to that veil you've got to come into the Holy Place, and there in that Holy Place, in all its quiet, is shining that seven-branched, golden lampstand. Here comes a priest, feeling bad over his sin, and now he's got to come and walk in the light. That's what John says too: 'My brothers and sisters, we are sinners, but this is what we're meant to do. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from sin' (1 John 1:7). Notice the verb, it's not if we *come* to the light but if we *walk* in it. That's a serious matter, for if you walk in the light it will expose you.

We see that from the stories recorded in John 8, where our Lord Jesus says, 'I am the light of the world.' There came some evil men bringing a woman, taken in adultery, and they said, 'Master, Moses said that she ought to be stoned. What do you say, master?' And he said, 'You who are without sin, cast the first stone at her.' And now they found out it was true that he was the light of the world, and with a few moments thought they turned round and walked out. You say, 'That proclaims they're sinners.' It does indeed. They knew without being told that if they dared stay, the light would have exposed them, so they went off and the woman was left. Oh, poor woman, she couldn't hide anything now, standing in the blaze of the light of incarnate glory.

What a thing. Everything exposed. It was a blessed thing to do, for if we're prepared to come and walk in the light and be exposed, we too shall know the comfort that our Lord gave to that dear woman when he said, 'Neither do I condemn you.' For we must come and walk in it, that that light might constantly show us up and penetrate our conscience and penetrate our minds and expose what is wrong and bring us to confession. This is the mark of a true believer. This is why forgiveness is no cheap thing. This is why, when a person is forgiven, really forgiven, they don't go out and live carelessly, because these are the conditions—if you walk in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. It is for men and women that are prepared not only to come to Christ, but to stick with Christ. 'If you continue in my word, you shall be my disciples really.' That's what it means to be a believer, to walk with Christ, to walk in the light and, as we do it, the light exposes us and, as it exposes us, there is forgiveness and the beginning of forsaking of sin.

The beauty of holiness

'Come and stand here,' says God, 'and stand by that veil.' You'd have been interested to do it, wouldn't you? At least you ladies would. I can see you going in and you'd go up to that veil and you'd say, 'Look at that thread and those beautiful colours. I wonder how they did such intricate work in those days: the needlework is so good. And look at those cherubim: that almost looks real.' And as you stood there by that lovely veil, you might even have been saying to yourself, 'How lovely God must be. We can't see him direct, but there he is behind that veil and this veil conveys to us something of the glory of God. And those cherubim

pronounce something about the holiness of God that kept our fallen father and mother, Adam and Eve, out of the garden.' Oh, the holiness of God and the Bible tells us that that veil is a picture of the flesh of the Lord Jesus in the day of his humanity.

Occupied with Christ

And here I come, fresh from my mistake and failure, and my miserable tainted conscience, forgiven. And God says, 'You'd better come and stand and look at my lovely Son.' You say, 'God, I'm not worthy to come.' Says God, 'I know that, but would you mind stop talking about yourself.' You know, some of us, when we have sinned, get so preoccupied with our sin that every time we come into God's presence, we're telling God. I fancy that the Lord might be saying, 'I knew that before. You've told me that a thousand times. I know you're horrible. Stop talking about yourself: talk about something beautiful. Talk about my Son and all the beauty of his life and get your mind engaged with every stitch in his life; the very beauty of it makes you forget yourself.' Says Paul, 'Gazing on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor 4:6) we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory. It is God's way of both forgiving us and making us holy. To see that lovely life gone, splashed with blood right across it—and then once more it is borne into my conscience: that lovely life was given for me.

Christ in life was for me and he gave his life for me. There's blood on the veil. I gather that Peter is saying the same kind of thing when he says, 'My brethren, you know, God is very critical about the way you live. He judges righteously.'

'Why is he critical of the way we live, Peter?'

'Because your lives were very vain, empty, before you got converted, but God has redeemed your life by the precious blood of Christ, the blood of a lamb without blemish and without spot. And God gave that life for you' (see 1 Pet 1:17-19).

An advocate with the Father

'Turn round,' says God, 'and put the blood now on the horns of that incense altar.' We needn't stay long but we can enjoy the wonder of it. The incense altar was the altar of prayer, where daily intercessions were made for the people of God by the priest, and it points us to what John says, 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sin' (1 John 2:1-2). He it is that maintains our fellowship with God. That uncleanness that would have defiled the very presence of God and made it impossible for God to keep with us, his blessed blood deals with the uncleanness, as the propitiation for our sins, and makes it possible for God to continue with his vain people. Oh, what a God this is. You can't move finger nor foot before he's got some part of his great salvation ready to save you—Christ in life, the veil of his flesh, for me, a ransom for all; Christ risen, interceding for me.

All the blood

Says God, 'And now you'll come back to where you started, at that altar. Come back, please, take the blood and pour out all of it, every drop.' 'Oh, God, I've only done one sin just now.' 'Never mind,' says God, 'all the blood.' My brothers, my sisters, it's a good thing to come back to where we started, however far we've advanced on the road of spiritual improvement. I think that's why our blessed Lord has us, at least once a week, come and remember him under the form of bread and wine, and we come back to where our salvation started. But I see some of you would still be here: a little older now and different from us youngsters. We've learnt that Jesus Christ died for our sins and right grateful we are. But you come with sixty years' experience of the Saviour, and the Holy Spirit has very often shown you his superlative glories, the magnificence of his life. When you come and take that humble loaf of bread, it tells you of a Saviour and you've seen so much more of him than I ever have seen—and the glory increases as the weeks of life go by.

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.⁴

We're not finished with the journey yet. Says God, 'My dear child, the blood brought you into my presence; but so that you can come in, the sacrifice had to go out. Come, take the body of the animal, take it outside the gate, outside the camp, unto the clean place. Burn it in the fire, where the ashes are poured out.' We're not left to invent the application. That you and I might come into God's eternal presence, Christ went out where the ashes are poured out and when the fire has burnt the sacrifice and you come to the ashes, there's nothing left there. It's burnt. Says the prophetic word, 'You have brought me into the dust of death' (Ps 22:15).

Outside the gate

To our ancient Jewish brethren, it was a stirring world; brought up in a temple with all its glories, its God-given ritual and its constant offering of sacrifices. 'But now,' says God, 'if you want my Son as your Saviour, you will have to leave it and come out. You cannot have both those continual sacrifices in the temple, constantly offered, and the sacrifice of my Son. You cannot stand with a Jerusalem that murdered the Lord Jesus, and have that Jesus as your Saviour. If you want him as your sin offering, he suffered outside the camp and gate, and you must come forth to him outside the gate, bearing his reproach' (see Heb 13:12–13).

And still today we must do it. Christendom has not always got it clear what the gospel really is. If we depend on Christ our Saviour and his sacrifice, we must stand with him and stand clear of anything that would compromise the basics of the gospel and the efficacy of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord.

⁴ Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989), 'How Great Thou Art.'

The Damage Sin Does

Let's begin our study by reading from the book of Leviticus, chapter 5.

And if any one sin, in that he heareth the voice of adjuration, he being a witness, whether he hath seen or known, if he do not utter *it*, then he shall bear his iniquity: or if any one touch any unclean thing, whether it be the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean cattle, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and it be hidden from him, and he be unclean, then he shall be guilty: or if he touch the uncleanness of man, whatsoever his uncleanness be wherewith he is unclean, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty: or if anyone swear rashly with his lips to do evil, or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall utter rashly with an oath, and it be hid from him: when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty in one of these *things*: and it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these *things*, that he shall confess that wherein he hath sinned: and he shall bring his guilt offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him as concerning his sin. And if his means suffice not for a lamb, then he shall bring his guilt offering for that wherein he hath sinned, two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, unto the LORD; one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering. And he shall bring them unto the priest, who shall offer that which is for the sin offering first, and wring off its head from its neck, but shall not divide it asunder: and he shall sprinkle of the blood of the sin offering upon the side of the altar; and the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar: it is a sin offering. And he shall offer the second for a burnt offering, according to the ordinance: and the priest shall make atonement for him as concerning his sin which he hath sinned, and he shall be forgiven. But if his means suffice not for two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, then he shall bring his oblation for that wherein he hath sinned, the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall put no oil upon it, neither shall he put any frankincense thereon: for it is a sin offering. And he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it as the memorial thereof, and burn it on the altar, upon the offerings of the LORD made by fire: it is a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him as touching his sin that he hath sinned in any of these things, and he shall be forgiven: and *the remnant* shall be the priest's, as the meal offering. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, If any one commit a trespass, and sin unwittingly, in the holy things of the LORD; then he shall bring his guilt offering unto the LORD, a ram without blemish out of the flock, according to thy estimation in silver by shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering: and he shall make restitution for that which he hath done amiss in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it

unto the priest: and the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven. And if any one sin, and do any of the things which the LORD hath commanded not to be done; though he knew it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, according to thy estimation, for a guilt offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make atonement for him concerning the thing wherein he erred unwittingly and knew it not, and he shall be forgiven. It is a guilt offering: he is certainly guilty before the LORD.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, If any one sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and deal falsely with his neighbour in a matter of deposit, or of bargain, or of robbery, or have oppressed his neighbour; or have found that which was lost, and deal falsely therein, and swear to a lie; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein: then it shall be, if he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took by robbery, or the thing which he hath gotten by oppression, or the deposit which was committed to him, or the lost thing which he found, or any thing about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in full, and shall add the fifth part more thereto: unto him to whom it appertaineth shall he give it, in the day of his being found guilty. And he shall bring his guilt offering unto the LORD, a ram without blemish out of the flock, according to thy estimation, for a guilt offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven; concerning whatsoever he doeth so as to be guilty thereby. (5:1–6:7)

Now let's read just a few verses from Psalm 69.

Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would cut me off, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty. Then I restored that which I took not away. (vv. 1–4)

May the Lord give us good understanding of his holy Word.

Tonight we have to deal with a topic that is somewhat gloomy, and the coward in me would like to apologise in advance, because a lot of what we shall have to consider could conceivably be distressing. Preachers like preaching on the lovely things because the congregation respond well, but woe betide the preacher that preaches on solemn things and distressing things: he won't be asked again! And yet, I mustn't apologise—I can and do apologise for my faulty exegesis and for my very imperfect exposition—but I may not apologise for God's holy word. And, as you know, I didn't write Leviticus and, in particular, I didn't write chapters 5 and 6! So, if tonight we find them directing our minds to things that we would rather forget and not face, things that stir memory and open cupboard doors to find skeletons, then we shall have to trust the kindness and love of God—that God writes these things for our good.

Lovely as God's salvation is, it is not escape from reality. It is a salvation that can take us by the hand and, because it can give us complete forgiveness of all our sins, it gives us the

courage, with God, to face ourselves, to face our past and to face our present and be realists along with God. I talk like that because tonight we come to study the offering that is called in the Old Testament the *trespass offering* or the *guilt offering*. As I have suggested in the title of this talk, we are to think tonight of the damage that sin does.

On Tuesday evening, our heart was warmed. We were thinking of the stain of sin, and therefore we thought of the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord that cleanses us from all sin. Tonight, we think of a sacrifice that deals with our trespasses, and in a sense we shall find our study glorious. It reminds us of our blessed Lord Jesus and that, through him, God has forgiven us all our trespasses. Our blessed Lord has taken the handwriting that was against us—all that long record of our trespasses against God and against man that stood contrary to us, that called God's law to witness that we had broken his law and gone against the purposes of almighty God and wasted God's time and wasted our own lives, and done damage to ourselves and damage to our fellow men and women. And the New Testament tells us that our blessed Lord, when he died for us, took that handwriting and—what lovely words they are—blotted it out (see Col 2:14). In the ancient world, when a man had a long debt that he couldn't pay, and then somebody came along and paid it for him, they didn't write on the bottom of it 'received with thanks' like we do in our modern world. They got out a sponge, because the old piece of paper would have been written with lampblack and with a sharpened feather or a stylus; and when the debt was paid, the creditor would get out a sponge and sponge it all out. And the apostle, by inspiration, uses that vivid illustration.

Can you see in your mind's eye the handwriting that was against you? Mine was a long, long, list. If you could rise tonight into the presence of God and see the divine ledger books, and if you asked 'Could I see Gooding's account—you know, that chap who was here tonight, preaching as if he was someone special?'—you'd see it occupied, I don't know how many pages, I have to tell you that with shame. But I'm happy to tell you that you'll find it all sponged out.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—
 My sin, not in part, but the whole,
 Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more;
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul!⁵

He sponged out the record, and then the Bible tells us he took that ugly record out of the way and he nailed it to his cross. I think I hear the hammer blows yet, for as men drove the nails through his hand, he was hammering the list of my sins to his cross, sponged out and forgiven, because there he paid the price. Glorious mercy.

On Tuesday we were thinking together of things like that when we were talking about the sin offering. So why now do we need another offering called the trespass offering, or the guilt offering? And so we shall start with that. What is the difference? I have to warn you that the learned theologian, scholars and commentators are themselves not quite agreed where the sin offering finishes and the trespass offering begins. Some of the very learned will tell us that the sin offering carries through into chapter 5 right up to verse 13; and then

⁵ Horatio G. Spafford (1828–88), 'When peace like a river attendeth my soul' (1873).

the trespass offering begins at verse 14. Why do they say that? They say you'll notice that at verse 14, the Scripture says, 'And the Lord spoke to Moses,' as though this was some new beginning but, they say, if you look back to 5:1, there's no 'and the Lord spoke to Moses' — we just carry on as we were before with an 'and if anyone sin' or something. That's perfectly true, but for you who are equally learned commentators just let me point out that you can't always use the phrase just like that. Look back in your Bible to chapter 2, verse 1 where we begin a new offering, the meal offering. There is no such phrase as 'and the Lord spoke to Moses', yet who would deny that chapter 2 is a different offering from chapter 1?

If you turn back now to chapter 5 that we have just read, you will see that verse 6 says 'When a man has sinned in certain things, he shall bring his guilt offering.' There is our technical word: a trespass offering, a guilt offering—verse 6 says it. So now what will our learned commentators say? They're ready with an answer of course. They say, 'The word just slipped in there a little bit but look at verse 11 where it says 'for it is a sin offering.' They say therefore that the guilt offerings don't really start until verse 14.

It's a complicated matter but it's like this. Some trespass offerings had this special feature that, when you came to offer your trespass offering for the Lord, sometimes the Lord would demand a straightforward trespass offering; but sometimes if you came to atone for a trespass, God would say, 'Well now, as your trespass offering, I want you to bring a sin offering.' And on another occasion he would say, 'For your trespass offering, I want you to bring a meal offering'; and sometimes he would say, 'For your trespass, I want you to bring a burnt offering.' Burnt offerings, sin offerings and meal offerings could all be used on certain occasions as trespass offerings. You'll forgive me for that little explanation and for having wearied you with such technicalities but I had to say that bit for the sake of the theologians! Even if you don't agree with me, I'm going to say that the trespass offerings start with chapter 5, verse 1. So now we can get down to our study.

Distinguishing the sin offering and the trespass offering

There's a sin offering, and a trespass offering or guilt offering, and the first question is, 'What's the difference?' Well you'll notice that they both deal with sin. On Tuesday we found that the sin offering is dealing with the stain of sin, the way that sin stains our conscience. The guilt offering is dealing with the damage sin does: that isn't put away quite so quickly. To look at it another way, if we went back to chapter 4 and looked at the sin offering, we should find that in the offerings that had to be brought when people sinned, some were large and some were small. What made the difference was who did the sin. You say, 'I thought all sins were the same and it doesn't matter who did it.' It does, my good friend. You see, here's a good gentleman and he's not long been converted, and before he was converted he was an alcoholic and a drug addict and living a poor, broken life. Two months after he was converted, the old temptation to go on the drink got at him and, in a moment of weakness, he gave way and the police picked him up that Saturday night. Sad, isn't it?

Of course it's sad, but not so sad as this. One night coming out of a plush hotel, there was an elder of the church and he couldn't stand on his two feet either, for he'd been at a businessmen's meeting and he got drunk. The newspapers would make a scandal of

that—an elder of the church caught drunk and disorderly in the street. It's the same thing but it's more serious with the elder, because of his long experience, because of his office in the church; and the sin brings more disgrace upon the Lord and upon his people. Said our Lord, 'It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you respectable people of Capernaum. Sodom and Gomorrah were lurid sinners. They sinned against the light, but how little light they had compared with you privileged people in Capernaum with the Son of God in your midst' (see Matt 11:23–24). For the more privileged, the higher the office, the more grievous is the sin. So the sin offering measures the seriousness of it by who it is that does the sin. If the high priest sinned, he had to bring an offering as big as if the whole nation had sinned, because of his high office. It teaches us who are the Lord's people, that sin becomes more serious the older we get, the more we know. Says James to the teachers in the church, 'Be careful, my brethren, be careful. You have stood there telling people what to do and not to do. You shall receive the greater judgment' (see Jas 3:1).

When we come to the trespass offering, again the seriousness is measured and differs in different circumstances, but note what the difference is. It is no longer according to who does it but according to the damage done. Some sins do more damage than other sins do. When it comes to damage, it doesn't matter who does it. A car skids along the road, knocks your little girl down and kills her. Now, Mother, I suppose it makes no difference to you whether the driver was an elderly man who was a little bit fuddled and he couldn't react quick enough; or it was a learner driver and she'd only passed her test two days ago and found herself in a tight position and didn't know what to do; or it was a wild youth, showing off to his girlfriend and speeding more than he should. In the end it doesn't make a lot of difference: the child is dead. It doesn't matter whether they did it intentionally or whether it was an accident: the damage is done and it will never be put right in this world. So these chapters are going to talk to us then about the damage sin does.

Paying what the law demands; paying for the damage

We shall notice another distinction between the trespass offering and the sin offering. When a man sinned, he just had to bring his sin offering and it was forgiven, because the stain of sin can be blotted out by the blood of Christ. Now we're thinking of the damage sin does, and we'll find that in many cases, where the damage can be estimated, then two things have to happen:

- (1) There is a sacrifice to God to deal with his wrath against sin.
- (2) There has to be restoration and restitution made.

Let me illustrate that. If I come driving my car through the High Street at eighty miles an hour and a policeman catches me, I shall be up before the magistrate. When the magistrate says, 'The reading is that you have been fifty miles an hour beyond the limit, going through High Street', it's no good my saying, 'But I didn't knock anybody over: I didn't do any damage.' The magistrate will say, 'You broke the law and you must pay the penalty for breaking the law, even though no damage followed.' But suppose in addition to breaking

the law, I collide with your car and just about ruin it; the magistrate will impose the fine on me for breaking the law and another hefty fine for driving without due care and attention—and you'll be after me for the money for your damaged car. It's no good my saying that I paid the fine to the magistrate, you want the money for the damage; and I shall have to pay it, or else my insurance company. Two things then: the fine for breaking the law and a payment for the damage.

My dear brother and sister, when I begin to think about this, sin begins to look solemn. I shall find, as I come in my need to Christ, a sacrifice to pay the fine, the penalty of sin for having broken God's law. But what about the damage my sin has done? Who's going to put that right? 'Well you'll have to do it,' says God. 'If it's in your power to pay back, you'll have to pay it back.' I would do that if I could, but the thing that haunts me is that some of the sins I've committed have done a damage that I could not possibly pay back.

Here's a young man brought up in a Christian home: his mother a beautiful Christian mother and his father a delightful Christian father. Yet the boy grows up selfishly, kicks over the traces and goes to the dogs, disgraces his parents and finds himself in prison more than once, among the worst of the offenders. Gradually, bit by bit, it kills his mother, who dies at forty-six, prematurely old, heartbroken. The boy eventually comes out of prison, hears the gospel and gets converted and God forgives him. It won't bring his mother back, will it?

Here's a university lecturer and he's supposed to be teaching the Bible and he teaches modernism; and he breaks the faith of this girl and that young student. They go out into the world thinking there's nothing in Christianity or the gospel either and they perish eternally. Suppose the lecturer eventually gets converted and comes to see how wrong he was. Yes, God will forgive him. What about the damage?

That's a topic we don't often like to think about—the damage sin has done—and yet we wouldn't be realists if we didn't face it. So now, you'll have to take your courage in both hands, and so shall I, as we face God's long list of the areas in which trespass could occur, both in the Old Testament and now in modern times, and he divides them into three groups. There's the first group in chapter 5, verses 1–4, and in that group are sins against truth (v. 1); sins against cleanliness (vv. 2–3); and sins against truth once more (v. 4). Let's take them one by one.

Sins against the truth

If any one sin, in that he heareth the voice of adjuration, he being a witness, whether he hath seen or known, if he do not utter *it*, then he shall bear his iniquity. (5:1)

There were situations in ancient Israel when God would demand that a man stand by the truth and confess the truth and tell exactly what he knows, and if the man refused to say what he knew, then God called it a trespass. Some of those occasions were special occasions, as when a man was put on oath. In many circumstances, we don't have to say everything we know, and sometimes wiser counsel is to keep our mouths closed. But this verse is envisaging

a time where a man is standing perhaps in court, someone maybe has been murdered, and he is called up to give evidence; but he doesn't want to give evidence, and so in the Jewish court they put the man on oath and, says God, 'If in that circumstance he doesn't stand with the truth, then he's guilty.' Why would he be guilty? Because a man might lose his life, or the wrong man be convicted, or a murderer set loose on the public, because this man refused to stand with the truth and confess what he knows.

You will remember in the Gospels how, when our Lord was brought before the high priestly court and they asked him many questions, as did the civil governor, Pilate, he answered never a word. But then the high priest charged him and put him on oath: 'I charge you by God that you tell us whether you are the Christ' (Matt 26:63). Our blessed Lord knew that if he said 'yes', they would condemn him to the cross for it. Why didn't he keep quiet then? Ah, but Leviticus 1 had said, 'If they put you on oath, you must confess the truth.' That could have particular relevance in our situation, couldn't it? I think of some men I know in this province and they got converted. The kind of thing they did before they got converted—what a lot they know. Must they tell? The Bible says that if they are put on oath, whether they have seen or heard or known, they must tell. Says a Christian man to me, 'But if I tell what I know, I could lose my life.' What's he got to do? Humanly speaking, our Lord lost his life too, for standing with the truth.

As we think of those momentous things, perhaps we ought to think of ourselves. Not that we're often put on oath about it, but if it is important to stand with the truth at another level. My brother, my sister, we know the truth, don't we? The gospel of men's salvation, they need it lest they perish. Suppose an argument has come up in your factory and the whole question of Christianity arises and whether you are or you are not a Christian; what are you going to do? Have we not got to stand with the truth whatever it costs us, whatever jeering and mockery and everything it costs? But standing with the truth is all important. What damage I could do at that level by never confessing Christ or standing with him. It is one of the sadder stories in our gospels that when our Lord was on trial for his life, Peter was given the chance to stand with the truth and with the Lord, and denied him.

Sins against cleanliness

'There is also sin against cleanliness,' says God, and spends two verses on it. It doesn't matter what kind of uncleanness. If a man knowing or unknowingly contracts uncleanness, then he shall be guilty, says God. What's so important about that? Well, just imagine the hundreds of thousands of Israelites in their camps and here is a man who has touched something infectious and he's going to bring an infection into the camp. You say, 'But he doesn't know.' Yes, I know he doesn't know, but look at the damage it's going to do and it's serious. Worse still if he knows it and is being irresponsible. You say, 'God will forgive me.' Yes, my good friend, but what about the damage you do?

I wonder what God would say to our modern world, not merely with external, physical uncleanness, but what about the way some men behave and contract AIDS and then give their blood; and unsuspecting babies and patients in hospitals get a blood transfusion infected with AIDS? How do you suppose that God in heaven feels about the damage that

sin does? And if God is concerned with physical uncleanness and the damage that physical uncleanness can do, what about mental health? I once was told a story by a Christian worker who used to visit the children's homes where children were being looked after by the state because their parents had failed them. He said he went into one room where there was a nurse with a little boy, and the boy screamed and the nurse had to ask my friend to go out. She pacified the child and then my friend was called in and the nurse stripped the little boy, and there were big marks all over his body and he told my friend, 'My father always beats me.' The nurse explained that the father used to come home drunk and get a red-hot poker and beat the child with it. Well you can see the physical damage. What about the mental and psychological damage? Is God concerned about mental health?

Here are two Christian parents who are always quarrelling and they have big rows; and a little child, at the time when he needs emotional stability, is wounded in his psychological makeup. It will dog him for the rest of his life; and isn't God concerned about the damage done to the child's mental health? 'You be careful the way you behave in your church,' says the writer to the Hebrews, 'lest the root of bitterness spring up and many be thereby defiled' (Heb 12:15). The church can get defiled by all sorts of things. Sometimes doctrinal disputes where the church has to stand against heresy. Sometimes personality clashes that divide the church, split it all ways; and all the distress and the tears, and some get offended in their faith and go off into the world. The damage done by sin—a root of bitterness and many defiled. So it's a serious thing. Have you ever known it happen in a church?

Sins against the truth

And from sins of uncleanness, we come back to sins against truth. Says the Holy Spirit, 'If a man irresponsibly takes an oath and he promises he's going to do this, that and the other and then he doesn't do it, God will hold him guilty.' Why? Because of the damage it does. Fancy promising in the name of God, in the name of the Lord God Almighty, and swearing an oath and then not doing it. That drags God's name down into the dust; and it damages whoever it is that's been dependent upon the promise. What would you think if God himself did it? You know the lovely Scriptures—that God, willing to show more abundantly the absolute security of the promise, confirmed it with an oath (see Heb 6:17). You say, 'That's marvellous. God has said that if I trust Christ I shall never perish, and he swears an oath on it. My sins and iniquities, he'll never remember again or cause me to pay their penalties.'

But what if tomorrow you find that God has changed his mind? Well if you thought God would behave like that, you'd say, 'There's no heaven.' The whole universe would go dark around you. There would be no security. You would be an absolute spiritual, moral and emotional wreck if God behaved like that. You depend for your very heaven on the fact that when God gives his oath, it remains eternally. And you've got to behave like that, says God.

Well you say, 'As a Christian, I don't swear.' But if you've ever made any solemn promises, did you keep them all? You said you'd be there at the prayer meeting. 'I'll come and help you to give out the tracts. I will, I faithfully promise.' But then the football match is on the TV . . . Likewise, I've known some businessmen who're going to make you a suit, and they jolly well know they can't get it done by next Tuesday, but they're afraid that if they

don't say they will, you'll take the order elsewhere. 'Yes, I'll have it done. Come next Tuesday.' And you go next Tuesday and he hasn't even begun. He never did intend to do it by next Tuesday. And there's you, having to go to your daughter's wedding in your old corduroy trousers! Oh, you grin, but there are a lot of businessmen do it that way round: not Christian businessmen, I hope. To make great promises, faithful promises and not to keep them, says God, 'You're guilty.'

Trespass in the holy things

What other areas are there? Well, the other two great areas we can deal with briefly, though they are altogether more solemn. First of all, there are sins in the holy things. Look at chapter 5, verses 14 onward: 'If a man sin in the holy things'. This is even more serious—trespassing in the things of God. You say, 'How do you do that?' Well take one example. The prophet Malachi says to his people, 'Will a man rob God?' (3:8). You wouldn't dream of popping through your neighbour's window and stealing his television, would you? But have you ever robbed God? Malachi was asking the question about paying tithes. Israel were under responsibility to pay tithes and some of them didn't pay. 'And you'll actually rob God, will you?' says Malachi. You say, 'We Christians don't have to pay tithes: we're not under the law.' No, you're not under the law. You're under grace. That means you pay more or less than the Jews did, and perhaps we never cheated God and kept back what is God's portion. But suppose I, as a teacher of God's word, come to you in the holy things of God and, to get your friendship, I tell you it doesn't matter if a man is born again—'you haven't to take notice of that, you see God is love.' And you can perish as a result of it.

Or I tell you that, being saved, you don't need to get baptised. What right have I to take God's holy things, God's straightforward commandments that tell us we must be baptised if we are believers, and tell you that you don't have to keep God's holy commandment? The blessed Lord says we have to keep the Lord's Supper. If I say it doesn't really matter, who do I think I am? The impertinence of me, robbing God of your obedience, sinning in the holy things. You say, 'Well, I did tell my friend it doesn't matter whether you're baptised or not. But you see, I hadn't read the Bible and I didn't really understand in those days.' You cheated in ignorance: that's a pity, because the Bible says you're guilty, whether you know it or not. You say, 'That's severe. That's stern.' So it is, but we're thinking of the damage it does. You make the mistake that you give the next-door neighbour's child who's got a cough a little poison instead of a cough mixture. You say, 'I didn't know the difference.' Well perhaps you didn't. What's the difference in the result?

Trespass in business life

Not only offences in the holy things, but at the beginning of chapter 6 God talks to us about trespasses in ordinary, everyday life in business. A man doing business deals; or somebody finding something and pretending he hasn't found it and keeping it when he should have given it back; or entering a contract and then breaking the contract—and all such things like that. Says God, 'In your daily life, if you break your contract and you cheat, then you have trespassed.' No good saying, 'I've got forgiveness of my sins and the Lord Jesus has forgiven

me, so I don't have to pay the income tax inspector. I can do a little black-marketing on the side.' Says God, 'No, you won't, because that income tax inspector is my minister. If you don't pay him, you're not paying me. And if you cheat, that's a trespass.'

Paying the debt

You say, 'What a gloomy talk you've given us tonight.' I have, but it's God's word. You say, 'How can I find relief for my trespasses?' Notice two things. In some of these trespasses, you'll never measure the damage and therefore God does not call for restitution. The damage can't be measured. How many souls did you influence against the Lord in your unconverted days and how many of them are going to be lost forever? Who can tell how much we've sinned against God in all these many things—sins against truth, sins against cleanliness—we've sinned against God, so we need a sacrifice. Oh, thank God that we come again now to why we are forgiven. There is a sacrifice that can bring us forgiveness with God, having forgiven us all of our trespasses. In the sacrifice the Israelite was asked to bring, you find a little phrase now and again, 'bring a bullock'. But what happened if a man couldn't afford it? Says, God, 'Well you'd better bring two birds.' But this man's so poor he can't even pay for two birds, so God will let him bring a handful of flour.

Even the best bullock couldn't pay our debt against God, but when I think of the damage of my sin—hearts I have broken, souls I have misled—who shall ever put it right? I praise God for the hope that not only has the death of Christ paid for my sins, but for all who would trust the Saviour, the damage will be undone. There's heaven, paid for by Christ. Then 'he restored that which he took not away.' On what terms? Says Christ, 'If you want me to forgive your trespasses, you will have to forgive other people their trespasses.' You say, 'I'm not going to. I could never forgive that stupid youth, roaring his car down our cul-de-sac. I warned him time and time again that one of these days he'd run over my child. He wouldn't listen and kept on coming, and he bashed my child and killed him. I could never forgive him and I'm not going to.'

Oh, my friend, who's paying your debt? Who has paid for the damage your sin has done? You say, 'Christ paid my debt.' He's forgiven you your debt. His conditions are that you forgive those indebted to you. And he warns us solemnly with a story of the man that was forgiven a little debt by his master and, having been forgiven, he went out and caught his brother by the throat and nearly throttled him, and he had only a tiny little debt, and couldn't pay. But his fellow believer put him in prison and wouldn't forgive him. So the Lord got hold of the first debtor and disciplined him and put him through the mill (see Matt 18:21–35). Oh, my brother, my sister, if I expect the Lord to pay my bills, because he forgives me my trespass and the damage done, he will demand that I forgive those who trespass against me when they repent, and forgive them for the damage done.

Finally, in the things of the Lord, says God, 'If you have cheated God in divine things, then the first thing you'll do is bring a sacrifice.' You say, 'Yes, I'm guilty of that. I've wasted my life and I've spent my time for myself. Even as a believer, I've robbed God of hours of my time.' Now you're repenting of it, and there's forgiveness in Christ. Thank God for the sacrifice of Christ that covers the way you have robbed God. What are you going to do

about it now? The second thing God says that you will do, if you can, is to make restoration for it. You say, 'How can I?' My brother, my sister, if God has forgiven me for having robbed him of my time and my money and my love, must I not try to make it up, to repay with unlimited devotion and uncalculating loyalty?

And what if I've cheated my fellow man? Well, says God, 'You'll do it the other way round then. If you want me to forgive you, first of all you'll restore what you cheated from your fellow man, and when you've restored it for him, then you can come and seek my forgiveness.'

Conclusion

What a solemn thing this has been. I mustn't apologise and I'm not going to. These are the trespasses we need to face and by God's grace, because of the security we have in Christ, we can face them, surely. With any distress they may cause us, rejoice in the sacrifice of Christ that paid our debt and paid for the damage. But where we have a responsibility, God give us the grace to see that we make the restoration.

Maintaining Zeal

This is the first of two comparatively short studies: first, the law of the burnt offering, under the title of *Maintaining Our Zeal*; and then we shall look at the law of the sin offering, under the general title of *A Sense of the Holy*. In our final study we shall be looking finally at the law of the peace offering, under the general title of *Practicing Peace*. So let's begin by reading from Leviticus 6.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering: the burnt offering shall be on the hearth upon the altar all night unto the morning; and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning thereon. And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh; and he shall take up the ashes whereto the fire hath consumed the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without the camp unto a clean place. And the fire upon the altar shall be kept burning thereon, it shall not go out; and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning: and he shall lay the burnt offering in order upon it, and shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out. (Lev 6:8–13)

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering: in the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD: it is most holy. The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in a holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting. Whatsoever shall touch the flesh thereof shall be holy: and when there is sprinkled of the blood thereof upon any garment, thou shalt wash that whereon it was sprinkled in a holy place. But the earthen vessel wherein it is sodden shall be broken: and if it be sodden in a brasen vessel, it shall be scoured, and rinsed in water. Every male among the priests shall eat thereof: it is most holy. And no sin offering, whereof any of the blood is brought into the tent of meeting to make atonement in the holy place, shall be eaten: it shall be burnt with fire. (vv. 24–30)

May the Lord give us good understanding of his holy Word.

Hitherto in our study we have been looking at the sacrifices that God gave his people in Old Testament days. Tonight we come to a kindred, but slightly different topic—the laws of the sacrifices that God gave to his priests. Our first task is to try and understand, as best we can, the difference between the instructions given to the people for these sacrifices, and the

instructions given to the priests, that are here called the laws of the sacrifices. The sacrifices as given to the people, as we have been discovering in these past evenings, were sacrifices by which Israel might come to God and, as his redeemed people, enjoy fellowship with him. That, at his invitation, they might come to his holy dwelling place, there to seek the Lord and to behold the beauty of the Lord, to enquire after the Lord and to perceive something of the awesomeness of his holiness, something of the beauty of his holiness. As they became aware of that holiness, they would become aware of their own unholiness; and God, in his mercy, would provide them with sacrifices that they might offer to cover their need and make atonement for their souls, forgiveness for their sins and cleansing for the stain of guilt—that they might continue to enjoy the fellowship with God and know themselves accepted in spite of their imperfections.

As we have been thinking of those things in our studies, they have pointed us to our great privilege that we too may come, not to some earthly shrine, but to the most holy of all, the very presence of God in heaven. In spirit, we enter that sublime abode and approach the awesome majesty of God; that we too might dwell in the house of the Lord, to enquire after the Lord, to perceive the glory and awesomeness of his holiness and the beauty of it. As we too, in that holy exercise, are made aware of our failings even as God's people, it will drive us back again to that great sacrifice of Christ, offered once and for all and never to be repeated, by which we draw near to God; by which we came at first as sinners, seeking pardon; by which we come now as believers and as priests into the presence of God.

We have also noticed that when we become aware of our shortcomings and the Holy Spirit reminds us again of the sacrifice of our Lord, here so beautifully typified in these Old Testament sacrifices, then our minds begin to shift. Our focus of attention goes from our own shortcomings and begins to concentrate on the loveliness of the Lord Jesus, and we begin to enquire how it was that he was able to act as a sacrifice for us. We discover, under the picture form of these sacrifices, that where we are all so imperfect, he was absolutely spotless and stainless and positively good and wonderfully healthy. And our hearts are drawn out in admiration for his masterfully perfect living; and God's great secret of making us holy begins to become apparent.

Starting with our need, he has now transferred our attention to Christ; that his death meets that need and then engages our vision with the Lord, until we begin to forget ourselves in that sense and, being occupied with Christ and admiring Christ, our admiration deepens to worship. And presently, by God's grace, we begin to become like him and are transformed into the image of our blessed Lord Jesus himself.

So far then, it has been comparatively easy to translate into our Christian level of experience, the lessons that God teaches through these ancient sacrifices. Now as we come to the laws, we shall have to make one or two adjustments if we are to profit from them. The first thing to notice is that they are not addressed to the people at large: these are addressed to the priests. The details of the sacrifices are addressed to the people at large. When a man wished to bring a gift to God, he needed to know what kind of gift would be acceptable. When a man needed to bring a sacrifice for sin or for a trespass, again he needed to be told what sacrifice God would find acceptable.

But now we come to the priest and we learn from these laws what we might have guessed—that the task of maintaining this ancient system of sacrifices was exceedingly complicated. You will say to me, ‘But those sacrifices were only symbols: the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer couldn’t possibly cleanse the conscience of any sinner.’ I know that, but though they were only symbols, it took quite a lot of zeal and care and attendance to maintain them, and that was the task of the priest. Allow me to use a familiar analogy, if I may.

We Christian people, thank God, don’t have to offer any sacrifices, literal sacrifices of animals, to cover our sins. We do have some symbols, however. As we meet on the Lord’s day, for instance, we have been given to keep the two symbols of bread and wine by which we remember the Lord Jesus—how he gave his body for us, how he shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. That bread is only bread and the wine is only wine, but though they are only symbols, somebody has to give attendance to the practical side of affairs. Someone had to bake the bread, some kind Christian man or woman had to go and purchase it, someone had to bring it, and there it lies now, before us upon the table that we might use it as a sacred symbol by which our memory shall be stirred of how the Lord loved us and gave himself for us.

It would be an embarrassing thing if, one of these Sunday mornings when the cover was removed from that plate, the congregation suddenly discovered that somebody had forgotten and the bread wasn’t there. What would you do? Or suppose someone removed the cover and there was the bread and you tried to break it, but the baker had made a mistake and the thing was hard as concrete and they couldn’t even break it. What would you do? Let me give a public word of thanks for those who look after these things. Don’t count them humdrum, my brother, my sister: preparing those holy symbols is a sacred task. Though they be only symbols, God observes your application to that duty, week after week, and we are grateful to you, and you shall have your reward.

Imagine what it must have been like for the priests in Israel with all that complicated system of sacrifices. Burnt offerings, meal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings, and all sorts of subdivisions and permutations. He had to know them all from A–Z; and what was the right thing to do when, and what to offer and what not to offer; and what to burn and what not to burn. A very complicated system it was and took a great deal of devotion and care for him to discharge his practical responsibilities aright.

Think for a minute of that burnt offering which we saw in one of our early studies. It was a gift that Israel brought to God to express their devotion to God. Every day of every week of every year, morning and evening, incessantly and without fail, Israel as a nation had to offer her daily burnt sacrifice that it might ascend to God and speak to God of Israel’s devotion to him; that they should love him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, but had failed to do it, though they wanted to do it. And here was the sacrifice that God had allowed them to bring instead, that it might symbolise that devotion to God as the whole sacrifice was burned and ascended to God as a sweet smelling savour.

This burnt offering was a sacrifice that a man might bring when he realised how deficient his own obedience had been; how poor his zeal and love for God had been. He brought his sacrifice, laid his hands on the head of it and then he slew it and it was offered.

Imagine a man coming like that with great spiritual exercise of heart, bringing a bullock, costly as it was to him. He comes into the court in all its solemnity. In the presence of God, he offers the bullock and he slays it and the blood is shed, and the priest cuts up the parts and they're put on the altar as the man stands there. What an experience, as the flame begins to catch hold and it burns and the man is warmed within, glowing with the warmth of that fire and seeing the smoke ascend to God, accepted for him. A sense of the holiness of God and the wonder of being accepted with God begins to burn in the man's soul. And presently, the offering begins to splutter and the smoke stops and the whole thing goes out. The priest hasn't done it properly. What a disaster.

And so God gave these regulations to the priest and, with this particular sacrifice, says God to the priest three times over, 'Because of what this sacrifice symbolises, the fire must never be allowed to go out. There shall be fire on the altar continually. The fire shall never go out.' Here then are instructions to the priest that will help him perform that sacred responsibility and ensure that the fire shall never go out. How shall we apply it to ourselves?

Hitherto we've been thinking of ourselves largely as believers who need the sacrifice of Christ to cover our sins and shortcomings. Even when we come to worship God and offer him the gift of thanksgiving and praise, we realise how far short we come and have to have recourse to the merits of the Lord Jesus. But as well as being ordinary people that come to get forgiveness, we are priests. And we too have the task that was given to the ancient priest. The ancient priest had the delightful duty that when men and women came in their need to find forgiveness, to find God, the priest was there to point them the way, to diagnose their need and point them to the appropriate sacrifice. And when they came to worship the Lord, there again the priest had the duty of leading their worship and leading them into the presence of God.

We too are priests, and around us there are millions of men and women that know not Christ, lost in their sins. When, in God's mercy, God's spirit begins to work in their hearts and they find a longing for God, you and I have the delightful privilege of being allowed to point them to Christ; to point them to that great sacrifice that can take away their sins, and explain to them some of the wonders of it and some of the details of it. How it can give us cleansing from the stain of sin, how it can deal with the damage that sin has done, how it can make peace with God and what are the terms of having fellowship with God; how it is that our great burnt offering covers our disobedience. We are priests too with the responsibility of worshipping the Lord, to maintain the glow of spiritual devotion to the Lord. While all believers are priests, what a delightful thing it is for some of you older folk to lead the Lord's people in their devotions to God and, if I might put it thus, to see that the fire doesn't go out. So let's come and look at some of these practical details that God asked of the Levites.

How to keep the fire going

Some of you are going to be at a big disadvantage. You live in such modern homes that you've forgotten how to light a coal fire and forgotten, even more, all the bother of keeping it

going! It's easy coming down in the morning when all you do is flick a switch and there is a beautiful electric fire. You don't know anything compared with what us old age pensioners used to have to do in days gone by, keeping the household fire going. And here God says to the priest, 'Now, in this particular sacrifice, the fire should never go out. So first of all in the morning, when you come to the altar, you will take away the ashes and then you will lay wood on it and then you will put the sacrifice in order upon the wood that's on the fire; and finally, you will offer all the fat of all the offerings on that fire.' Let's go over that step-by-step.

'The burnt offering shall be upon the hearth all night.' There it burned, even when nobody was there. All night long it burned to the glory of God, but now in the morning, a new day, the priest comes to attend this altar and he's got to keep the fire burning. It has burned low and the red ashes have turned a bit to grey. What shall he do? I know what the temptation would have been—to have got a pair of bellows and try to fan it up. Were you ever tempted like that in your youth? You came down in the morning and there had been a beautiful, cosy fire last night and you had roasted your toes around it, and a few friends had gathered and the glow of the fire helped the glow of the conversation. And then you went to bed and you come down in the morning and it's all grey and cold and uninviting. You wouldn't want to sit round it and, before the good wife comes downstairs, it's your charge to get the fire going.

Taking away the ashes

There were mornings when you were tempted to cheat, weren't there? What you should have done is to have rolled up your sleeves and very carefully got the ashes away: because if you don't take the ashes away, yesterday's ashes choke today's fire. You'll have an awful job getting it going if you keep the ashes in too long. They'll choke the flame. You had the temptation of saying, 'That's too much bother, taking ashes away. Let's see what I can do.' And you poke it a bit and put some more wood on, and the coal. Well it might work one day, but it wouldn't work very many. No, you've got to take the ashes away.

If you can't be fanciful, well then you'll give me a pardon! You came to Christ first and found in him your great sacrifice. You saw you were accepted with God, standing, so to speak, by the very cross of Christ. How your heart was warmed as you realised you had forgiveness and acceptance with God. What a glow in your heart. And the days went by. Did it happen with you that the fire burned down a little bit and the feelings of warmth and wonder began to die away? I know it happened to one man, because he wrote a hymn about it.

Where is the blessedness I knew
 When first I saw the Lord?
 Where is that soul-refreshing view
 Of Jesus and His word?⁶

⁶ William Cowper (1731–1800), 'Oh, for a closer walk with God' (1772).

That blessedness when first I felt my heart melt with contrition and tears, now gone. Many of us, when first we had those experiences—the initial glow of the sense of acceptance with God and the wonder of the sacrifice with Christ seemed to die down a bit—we tried to fan it up again. Here came an exhorter of a preacher and he got the poker out and poked us. That's a dangerous thing to do when the fire's running low. Poke it sometimes if there's a lot of coal on and it will burst out into new flame. Poke it when it hasn't got much to burn but ash and all you'll do is get a few sparks and then make it worse than it was before. Oh, my brother, my sister, when you find me with the glow gone and I'm looking dull and grey and the ashes are there, don't poke me too hard, will you? You'll make me despair. What you've got to do is take the ashes away and put some new material on the altar.

You say, 'But it isn't very warm now. If I get the side of a bullock and put that on, that'll put the temperature down worse than ever.' Haven't you noticed that when you've been entertaining your friends and you've been a bit lazy, and instead of putting the coal on when you should have done, you've let it burn too far? It's a beautiful red roaring grate. Now you put the coal on, and the temperature has gone down. It'll be a while before it comes again. If I'm not wrong, something like that happens with spiritual life. You've enjoyed that delightful verse, 'the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). You read it the other day. It meant a tremendous amount to you. It fired your very heart, and you read it the next day and the next day. Now you read it and it doesn't quite produce the same feeling as it did. And as for brother Mephibosheth, the first time you heard him pray, it was delightful and the second time wasn't bad. Now you've heard him more than a thousand times and he keeps on saying the same thing. Somehow it doesn't quite move you as it originally used to move you.

What's to be done? Don't try to recapture the old glow and the old feelings. How did you get the first lot of feelings? Well you say, 'I woke up to the value of the sacrifice of Christ. That's what happened and I found Christ died as my personal Saviour. He died for my sin and, oh, the wonder of forgiveness of sins'; and you've lived on it for a long while. But now it's died down a bit, let the ashes come away. Don't try and work yourself up into a glow such as you had last week. Accept the fact that the feelings have gone, take the ashes away and put some new material on.

Putting on new material

You say, 'What do you mean by "new material"?' Well, the sacrifice of Christ is inexhaustible, you know. How did you find him? You say, 'As my sacrifice for sin.' Alright, have a go now at the burnt offering, if you like. Christ as your great burnt offering. You say, 'I don't know what that means and Leviticus scares me stiff.' If anybody starts talking about Leviticus the temperature goes down rapidly in the congregation: it's difficult stuff. Yes, it's like putting a lot of coal on a fire and the temperature goes down. But it's the only way to get another glow. New material, and if you've read one verse from the New Testament, try another. What about him who has procured for us justification? You say, 'I don't know what that means.' You don't? Well that's good, because now you've got a whole heap of new material to be put on to the fire of your worship. When you discover what that means—it

looks a bit dark now and a bit heavy—but when, by God’s spirit, you’ve discovered what it means, the fire of God begins to take it up for you. What a glow justification will cause, let alone reconciliation and redemption and atonement.

And what about a little drop of Ezekiel? You say, ‘My fire isn’t ready for Ezekiel yet.’ I understand exactly what you mean, but don’t forget it’s there in the storehouse. All the material God has given us, all calculated under God’s spirit, when he makes it meaningful to us, will show us the wonder of Christ who died for us; and as we see it, it will ignite the fire of devotion within.

Remember the wood!

Practical point number one: don’t go trying to revive yesterday’s glow. Accept the feelings have gone, take the ashes away and put some new material on.

Here’s the priest now: he’s learnt to do his job properly and he’s taken the ashes away. Now he’s going to put some new material on. ‘Wait a minute,’ says God, ‘before you put any of that bullock on there, I’d like you to put some wood on the fire first.’ Why’s that? Well any boy scout will know. The fire is still alight but if you put a whole side of bullock on it you’ll put the thing right out. It couldn’t stand it. So, says God, ‘Before you put the offering on, I want you first to put some wood on so that it catches light easily, and then it can take the big bits.’

You say, ‘The sacrifice was the thing that gained them peace with God and forgiveness of sins.’

Yes, it speaks of the sacrifice of Christ and it’s a very precious symbol.

‘The wood, what did that do? Did that atone for anybody?’

Certainly not.

‘Why have it then?’

Simply so that you could have the symbol of a bullock offered to God, that’s why.

And now we come to make a very important distinction. You’re a priest and you have the chance to address your Sunday school or an evangelistic meeting, and point them to the sacrifice of Christ and you’re hoping God will use it to enlighten their minds and bring them to Christ in faith. And you say to yourself:

‘It’s not my eloquence that’s going to save them.’

That’s a good thing to remember.

‘And it isn’t my knowledge that goes to save them.’

Quite right.

‘And it isn’t my great theological study that will save them.’

No. What is it that will save them?

‘The sacrifice of Christ will save them.’

Yes, but what does that mean?

‘My eloquence couldn’t save anybody. My learning couldn’t save them, so I shan’t need to be eloquent and I shan’t need to learn anything, and I shan’t need to put any effort into it at all.’

Is that so, and you’ve nothing to do?

You can't just get up and God will give you the words, on the technique of 'open thy mouth and God will fill it'. I wish it worked, because I should know all about Ezekiel forthwith on those terms! Oh, my brother, my sister, I know that what we do can't save anybody. If you are going to put across, to preach, to explain the sacrifice of Christ to your five-year-olds in the Sunday school class, or to your workmates, or to whoever it is, you add nothing to the merit and value of God's sacrifice. But it will take you every ounce of sweat you've got, every ounce of energy, long hours of the study of God's holy word, burning yourself out that God may use you to make the gospel—to make the sacrifice of Christ—real to other folks.

There was no magic in how that fire kept burning. The fire originally came from God, but to keep it going the priest had to find the wood and all Israel had to offer wood, and it was stored to be used. I don't know how you regard your gifts: mine are cheap old scraps of wood, and yours the beautiful pine. But never mind, if you're going to be active and useful for Christ, pointing others to the Saviour, you'll have to burn your wood.

Why is it that sometimes when we come to worship the Lord, there's a dearth and a deadness? The sacrifice of Christ is wonderful, immeasurably glorious. Why hasn't it enthused our hearts? Why can't I lead the Lord's people in warm and powerful worship? Well, because I haven't been preparing the wood, haven't studied his word, and I don't know much about the sacrifice of Christ. Do I suppose that when I come to the meeting, God is going to do a miracle, flick the switch and the glory is going to come through? No, we must burn the wood first; we've got to do a lot of work then and burn ourselves out, according to our abilities.

Putting the pieces in order

Then, God says, 'When you've got the wood alight, you will put the pieces of the sacrifice in order upon the wood that is on the fire.' Any farmer will know that if ever you've tried to get a fire going out of doors, you've got to be very careful the way you put the stuff on, even the wood for that matter. If you just pitch it on and it's a small fire, it won't catch. It will burn in the middle and the sides won't burn. If you want the thing to burn, you've got to put the pieces on carefully in order, so that the flame can get at the pieces and it can take hold and, beginning with the little pieces, it will then go to the big pieces.

Imagine the task of burning great sides of a bullock, legs, thighs, inwards. You'd need not only to cut them up, you would need to put them in very careful order on that fire. And I think it is like that with the sacrifice of Christ. If as a Christian priest you are wanting to point somebody to the great sacrifice of Christ and how it atones for their sins, must you not do it in order? Here's a newcomer: he hasn't got a clue about the gospel but his conscience is beginning to work and he's started to get interested in spiritual things. I come along to preach him the gospel and I say, 'My man, you need to be saved. You need the great saving work of Christ, you know, because you're all dead in sins like Babylon the Great. Men and women are defiled in the sight of God, like Ezekiel says, and what you need is the red cord in your window, like Rahab the harlot.' And the man looks at me and thinks, 'What on earth is he talking about? A red cord in my window?'

Well, some preachers have used it—the illustration of Rahab and the cord in her window, and used it very effectively in the gospel—but here’s me, I’ve got it all out of context, and here’s a man who knows absolutely nothing. What’s the good of me talking to him about types and shadows and all complicated things? I’ve got to get the very simplicity of the gospel and put it on, and I’ve got to put it in order. You say, ‘I shall have to know my details.’ You will, yes. It will mean knowing what’s suitable for this person and what’s suitable for that person and, under the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit, to be able to present the Lord Jesus and his great sacrifice in proper order, so that it makes sense. You say, ‘What a lot of work you’re making it sound.’ Yes, of course. What did you think? The office of priest in Israel wasn’t a sinecure: it was hard, constant work.

The best for God

Finally, says God to the priest, ‘When you’ve taken the ashes away and you’ve put new material there, and then you put the wood on, and then you put the pieces of the sacrifice in order, so that they catch light’—then what? Says God, ‘You shall take the fat out of every sacrifice. Priest, let me tell you again, you must not eat any of the fat.’ Many of the parts of the animals were given to the priest to eat, but never the fat. Says God, ‘The fat is the food of my offerings made by fire.’ You may see some deep spiritual significance in it, and rightly perhaps, but for the moment, I want to see its practical point. Why fat? What do you have it for?

Well, think of me, way back in the Dark Ages, coming downstairs in the morning to keep the fire going. At last, I’ve got the ashes away and I’ve put the wood on and I thought it was alight and I put some coal on, and now it isn’t going to take. And then I cheat: you know what men are! This thing isn’t going to catch light, so away I go out into the back garden and get a little paraffin. I stand back in case anything amiss happens, and ooh, the thing comes up and that gets it going! Says God, ‘And when you’ve got that mighty great beast all in parts upon that wood, then take all the fat and put it under, so that they blaze.’

All that practicality for keeping those symbols going. We deal with infinitely more important things, used by God’s spirit to make the sacrifice of Christ meaningful to men and women. Says God, ‘You’ll give me the fat.’ As we saw the other night, when the Hebrews speak of the fat, metaphorically they mean ‘the very best’. Says God, ‘You’ll give me all the fat.’ You know, we must serve the Lord in different capacities and many of us have our secular tasks to do. But God forgive us if ever we thought that we could serve the Lord and teach his word and point others to Christ as a kind of hobby—you’d do it if you had an odd moment free from other things. No, you won’t. If you would be used of God as a royal priest to show forth the glories of God to men and women around, to lead his people in their worship, you’ll find it will demand the very best of thought, of mind, of energy and of time for God.

A Sense of the Holy

We look now at that second law—the law of the sin offering. You will notice the difference that, in this law, it is not said that the fire shall be kept burning forever. That isn't the point. In the law of the sin offering, what the Holy Spirit keeps emphasising to the priest is this: 'This is most holy.' That then is the point which we have to get. Let's think then what it means to be holy.

In the Old Testament, holiness contrasts with two things. You can have something that is holy contrasted with something that is unclean; or you can have something that is holy contrasted with something that is common. Here is a man who has been defiled by some immoral behaviour or by contact with a dead body or something. He is unclean and unfit to come into the presence of God. If you'd like to say his uncleanness is a form of un-holiness, well okay. And so when God is talking to the priest about his duties with the sin offering, what he stresses is, 'You must be holy: you must carry out these things in the Holy Place.' That will of course mean that the man must be clean. It means something else—holiness in that other sense. So let's illustrate that.

Mrs Brown's kitchen is beautiful. There isn't a speck of dust in it. All the pots and pans are scrubbed every other half-day. They shine, they are immaculate. Should Mrs Brown have cooked some sausages in the aforesaid pots and they become a bit greasy, Mrs Brown never puts them back until she has got all the grease off, and there they are, shining again. No one would ever think that Mrs Brown's pots weren't clean. Yes, but it doesn't necessarily mean they're holy. In Israel, the priests in the temple, as they went about the sacrifices, had to use pots of various kinds. Says God, 'Those pots are holy.'

What do you mean, 'they're holy?'

'Well, not merely that they're clean, but they're mine. Absolutely consecrated to me, set aside for me. They're not common old pots, they are sacred pots and the work in which they are engaged is sacred work.'

And to that end, God is working with us. Not merely with our pots, but with the vessels that are our bodies. If we have been redeemed, he's beginning to teach us the lessons of holiness that we should be consecrated to the Lord—sacred to him, not merely clean of all negative stain but positively devoted to him. The prophet Zechariah looks forward to the day when Israel, being redeemed, the very pots in Jerusalem in which they cooked their food shall be 'holy to the Lord'; and the horses that pull the carts around the city will have on their harness 'holiness to the Lord'.

Such holiness our Lord already seeks with us, as he did with his disciples in the cornfield. When the Pharisees accused his disciples of breaking the Sabbath, because they

were rubbing the ears of corn, our Lord defended them. In his eyes they weren't breaking the Sabbath. Like the priests in the temple have to work constantly for God, whether it be Sabbath or not, so said our Lord, 'My disciples here, working at that corn, are working for me and I am greater than the temple. Therefore their humble act of grinding the corn is a sacred act and done for me who am greater than the temple' (see Matt 12:1-8). God aims at holiness, at the sense of sacredness in our lives.

Losing the sense of the sacred

Now watch again, here comes an Israelite. He's been burdened with his sin and his guilt this last nine months and, at last, he's come to repentance and he's decided to obey God's Old Testament law. He's going to go up to Jerusalem, he's going to buy a sheep—it's as much as he can afford. He's going to find the temple, he's going to go in and find a priest, and he's going to ask the priest to offer this for his sin. So here he comes and all is solemn. He confesses his sin before God and he lays his hand, like the priest tells him, on the head of the animal and then he kills the animal before the Lord, conscious that the eye of God is upon him. It's only a symbol but it's serious; and for him it's a real spiritual experience. He's beginning to do it and cut the animal. 'Look here,' says the priest, 'hurry up. It's getting time for tea and I'm meant to be home.'

What's happening now? Well, you see, the Israelite didn't come many times: he couldn't afford many times to offer a sheep. For him, it's a wonderful thing, a holy moment. The priest has done it thousands of times and now is another time. He's done it so frequently, it's become common, ordinary; it has lost the sense of the sacred. When it came to sin offerings, the priests were allowed to have most of the meat of the animal, and eat it. That's how they earned their living. For them, it was desperately easy for it to become nothing but a professional matter—cold, formal, official, a business thing—and the whole sacredness had gone out of it. Have you ever sensed a danger like that, of becoming so familiar with divine things that the sense of the sacred goes out, and it becomes ordinary? We who preach know the danger. It can happen to other folks too: 'Oh, it's just another breaking of bread.' You've been to so many thousands, and lost the sense of the sacred.

Maintaining the sense of the sacred

How do we maintain the sense of the sacred if we're constantly engaged in divine things? Here now are a few practical counsels from the Lord to this priest. First of all he says, 'When you have that sin offering killed, it is to be killed before the Lord in the place where the burnt offering is killed.' May I interpret the algebra? The burnt offering tells us about the devotion of Christ, his obedience unto death. Now says God, 'When you kill the sin offering, I want it killed in the place where the burnt offering is killed, please.' And it reminds us of this: we sin very easily; but our sin wasn't put away so easily, was it?

Come with me to where the burnt offering of our Lord was killed. Listen to him. As he kneels in Gethsemane and he prays, not like Peter saying, 'Yes, I'm ready. I'm ready to go into prison or death. Oh, yes, I'm ready to go.' Of course not. He comes to Gethsemane and he kneels and he says, 'Abba Father,' appealing to God by his love. 'Father, all things are

possible to you,' appealing to God's infinite power. 'Then by your love and by your power, let this cup pass.' It cannot pass. 'Then thy will be done' (see Mark 14:36). And the sweat came out like drops of blood. Let me never forget it. When we stand to speak of holy things and the matter of forgiveness and we quote our John 3:16, God forbid that it should ever become ordinary. Let me as a priest constantly recur to Gethsemane and Calvary and see the devotion that it cost Christ to put away our sin.

Separating the sacred and the common

'And you, priest,' says God, 'when you eat that sin offering, you've a right to eat it—it's right that they that preach the gospel should live of the gospel—but you'll eat it in a holy place. You won't take it home as your Sunday joint.' There's nothing wrong with Sunday joints, but this is sacred. Do you know your brothers and sisters in Corinth? I'll tell you a secret about them. In the early days, in their church at Corinth, they began to remember the Lord Jesus with the bread and the wine; and then they did it at the end of a social gathering. They brought their food and their drink and they had a social gathering, and they attached the Lord's Supper to the end of it. Do you know what happened in the end? They forgot which was which and the sacred thing of the Lord's Supper got all mixed up with their social gormandising. 'Don't any longer,' says Paul. 'Separate that out. Keep the Lord's Supper distinct, for that's sacred.' My dear young folks, there are many joys in Christ, but take the advice of an old, grey-head: keep what is sacred, sacred, won't you? The joys of Christ are not just one more joy added on to your football and your guitar. These are sacred things. Pray God that we never let the sacred lose its sacredness by being confused with the secular.

Bought and separated

'And when you come to eat it,' says God, 'any pot, anything that the flesh of the offering touches, shall be holy.' That's not a command but a statement. It's not saying if you want to touch the flesh of the sin offering, you'll have to be holy in order to touch it. No, it's saying it the other way round. It says if you ever happen to come in contact with that flesh, forthwith you shall be holy—meaning you shall be consecrated to God. Remember Mrs Brown and her pots? Beautiful pots, but of course while they stayed in her kitchen, she had the control of them. Should it ever have happened one day that Mrs Brown's pot got confused with the Levitical pots and some Levite used it to cook the sacrifice in, do you know what would happen to Mrs Brown's pot? She'd never get it back again. It would be dedicated to the Lord hereafter: it would be the Lord's after that. You can see why Mrs Brown didn't like her pots coming anywhere near the sacrifice.

My dear brother and sister, have you come anywhere near the sacrifice of Christ? Have you touched him? Then I have to tell you that your vessel isn't yours anymore. For if you have touched the sacrifice of Christ, says God, 'You are not your own: you have been bought with a price' (1 Cor 6:19–20). To take something that isn't mine and run off with it as though it were mine, that's robbing God. Says God, 'That sacrifice is so holy that if any of the blood got sprinkled on the priest's garment as he was attending to the sacrifice, then he had to wash in a Holy Place. He mustn't go out back home with that blood on his garment. That

blood is holy blood, not to be mixed with common things. It must be washed in a Holy Place, so holy is that garment.'

May God maintain in us the sense of the awe at the sacredness and the holiness of the blood of Christ. The Bible tells of some people who count the blood of the sacrifice a common thing. Says God, 'For them, there awaits the fire of judgment, immeasurable.' No believer would count the blood of Christ common, but how easy for me to find the sense of its value become lessened in my mind. God forbid it to happen, for precious is that blood.

Oh, precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.⁷

You've been redeemed with precious blood and, says Peter, 'I'd be careful how you live, because God is critical and he judges every believer according to his works.' Rightly critical, for see the cost that he has paid in the blood of Christ to redeem us.

Still sacred, not secular

Finally, says God, 'If you cook it in any vessel, an earthen vessel must be broken, a brazen vessel must be scoured, lest anything of the sacredness of that sacred sacrifice be conveyed outside and become common.' So they cooked their sacrifice and it was in a sense the priest's daily food. It remained a sacred thing. I'll have a word with the theologians present. You're a young man reading theology, and you have to process your subject, just like the engineer is learning about mechanics and engineering. You write essays and he writes essays, and you pass exams and he passes exams, and what's the difference? May God save us, who in any sense professionally study holy things, lest they become for us just one more subject, and the thing loses its sacred dimension and becomes merely a secular means of getting a good degree and a good job. Alas, for our theological schools and universities, where theology has ceased to be a sacred subject and become almost secular.

Outside the gate

There were sacrifices that the priest was not allowed to eat. The bodies of those whose blood was taken into the Holy Place, had to be taken out and burned outside the camp. You're not left to decide what that means. The Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 13 tells us:

Jesus, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate, outside the camp. Let us come forth to him and bear his reproach. (vv. 12-13)

And still today, the Holy Spirit will ask us thus to walk consistently with the gospel. The gospel is not merely a theoretical thing that I work at in my study, and I get it all complete

⁷ Robert Lowry (1826-99), 'Nothing but the blood of Jesus' (1876).

and I can preach my sermons on it. There comes the practical side and I must see to it that my behaviour and walk and ways in this world run absolutely consistent with the sacrifice of Christ. The early Christians came to believe on the Lord Jesus as the sole sacrifice for sin. 'Now, says God, 'you'll show you stand with him by removing yourself from the Judaism that rejects him.' And so you will behave consistently with the gospel—not preaching justification by faith one day and then on Tuesdays so behaving that people think that you see no difference between the gospel and what they preach in Judaism. Your behaviour must be one hundred per cent consistent with the gospel and the sacrifice of Christ, who for our sake suffered outside the camp and outside the gate.

A wonderful privilege

We've been thinking of very practical things and very solemn things. Let God fill our hearts as we go home tonight with a sense of the wonder. My brother, my sister, when you think of what we once were:

All these once were sinners,
Defiled in his sight.⁸

How did it ever come that God not only saved us, but gave us this ministry of reconciliation, to be a holy priesthood and royal priests, to handle holy things, and be able to point our fellow men and women to the great sacrifice of Christ? May God so fill us with the sense of the glory and the wonder of that privilege that no duty will prove too hard that God asks of us; or any zeal too much that we might discharge our responsibility and so honour him as priests. For his name's sake. Amen.

⁸ Arthur T. Pierson (1837–1911), 'With harps and with viols.'

Practising Peace

Now we shall begin our last study by reading from Leviticus 7 and verse 11 onwards.

And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which one shall offer unto the LORD. If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour soaked. With cakes of leavened bread shall he offer his oblation with the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving. And of it he shall offer one out of each oblation for an heave offering unto the LORD; it shall be the priest's that sprinkleth the blood of the peace offerings. And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his oblation; he shall not leave any of it until the morning. But if the sacrifice of his oblation be a vow, or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offereth his sacrifice: and on the morrow that which remaineth of it shall be eaten: but that which remaineth of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burnt with fire. And if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings be eaten on the third day, it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be imputed unto him that offereth it: it shall be an abomination, and the soul that eateth of it shall bear his iniquity. And the flesh that toucheth any unclean thing shall not be eaten; it shall be burnt with fire. And as for the flesh, every one that is clean shall eat thereof: but the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from his people. And when any one shall touch any unclean thing, the uncleanness of man, or an unclean beast, or any unclean abomination, and eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which pertain unto the LORD, that soul shall be cut off from his people. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Ye shall eat no fat, of ox, or sheep, or goat. And the fat of that which dieth of itself, and the fat of that which is torn of beasts, may be used for any other service: but ye shall in no wise eat of it. For whosoever eateth the fat of the beast, of which men offer any offering made by fire unto the LORD, even the soul that eateth it shall be cut off from his people. And ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whosoever it be that eateth any blood, that soul shall be cut off from his people. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, He that offereth the sacrifice of his peace offerings unto the LORD shall bring his oblation unto the LORD out of the sacrifice of his peace offerings: his own hands shall bring the offerings of the LORD made by fire; the fat with the breast shall he bring, that the breast may be waved for a wave offering before the LORD. And the priest shall burn the fat upon the altar: but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons'. And the right

thigh shall ye give unto the priest for an heave offering out of the sacrifices of your peace offerings. He among the sons of Aaron, that offereth the blood of the peace offerings, and the fat, shall have the right thigh for a portion. For the wave breast and the heave thigh have I taken of the children of Israel out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them unto Aaron the priest and unto his sons as a due for ever from the children of Israel. (vv. 11–34)

And may God give us good understanding of his holy Word.

For our last study together this evening, we take one more of the laws of the sacrifices. On Tuesday last, we introduced ourselves to this particular topic and we noticed the difference between the instructions for the sacrifices, as are given in the early chapters of Leviticus, and these further instructions—what are called the laws of the offerings. We noticed that the details of the sacrifices themselves are addressed to the people at large, because the people at large needed to know, when they were in some spiritual need, what sacrifices they could bring and should bring to the Lord. But then we found that the laws of the offerings are addressed to the priests and they deal with a number of practical things that would be necessary for the priests to know and to do, that they might maintain that complicated system of symbols that God had given to Israel.

You may remember we illustrated it to ourselves from our own Christian symbols. On the Lord's Day, when we meet at the Lord's Supper to remember the Lord, we use symbols of bread and wine. For ourselves, as a congregation, we find the bread a symbol of the Lord's body, and the wine a symbol of his blood. Those symbols lead our thoughts and our hearts and our devotions out towards the Lord Jesus, to a deeper spiritual understanding of the wealth of his person and sacrifice. But then we observed some very homely and humble things. If we're going to use bread and wine as symbols, somebody or other has got to bake the bread and make the wine, and prepare it and bring it along of a Sunday. And though it is a simple thing, yet it requires responsibility and reliability and persistence in the discharge of that humble, but valuable service. So that the rest of us can enjoy and use the symbol, somebody has got to look after the practical details.

And so we thought of ourselves: we are priests, responsible to preach the glorious sacrifice of Christ to our fellow men and women and, where we find people in need of forgiveness, to point them to the sacrifice of our Lord. Nothing that we can say can add value to that sacrifice. Nothing that we can say or do can take away anybody's sins, but if we would discharge our office as priests and point people to the sacrifice of Christ and explain to them the sacrifice of Christ, behind the scenes it will involve us in a great deal of hard work—getting to know that sacrifice, understanding all its parts so that we can, so to speak, put them in order before the people and bring the people to understanding and enjoyment of them.

Similarly, as priests we have responsibility to worship the Lord, to give thanks to God. When we do so, we're thinking again of our blessed Lord, thanking God not merely for material benefits, but thanking him for the great sacrifice of our Lord. Nothing that we can say to God can add any value to the sacrifice of Christ, yet on the other hand, if we would

praise the Lord and worship him as we should and lead others in the worship of the Lord Jesus and in the appreciation of him and of his value, behind the scenes that is going to involve us in a great deal of work—some hard study of God’s word, some hours in prayer, some careful thought as to how we shall speak and arrange things.

On Tuesday night, we were looking at the laws first of all of the burnt offering and then of the sin offering. We found that they taught us how to maintain our zeal and keep going the fires of our worship of God. And then as we studied the laws given to the priest as to how he was to arrange and conduct the sin offering, we thought how God there so counselled him that he should maintain a sense of the holy—so difficult for a priest, when he was doing this kind of thing every day of the week, year in, year out, for some twenty-five to thirty years. It was, as I say, so difficult for the priest to maintain a sense of the holy. The whole thing could easily become common and ordinary and lose its power, and become merely a way by which the priest earned his bread and butter and made his living.

We recognise the same danger in ourselves, not that many of us maybe earn our living from preaching the gospel. But when we become, after the years, so familiar with divine things, there is a danger that sometimes we lose the sense of the holy and these thrice holy things become ordinary and cease to move our hearts as they should. And so we thought about some of the practical exhortations and laws that God laid down for his ancient priests to help them maintain the sense of the holy.

Peace in its full sense

Tonight we are to study the final law, the law of peace offerings, and I have entitled our study *Practising Peace*. What I mean by that I shall try and explain by reminding you of what we found in our study of the peace offering itself. We were thinking together from chapter 3 of this book, of the peace offering. We saw it as a picture of our blessed Lord Jesus, by whose sacrifice we find peace with God. We reminded ourselves that the Hebrew word for peace is a very large word. Like our English word it means the cessation of hostility, the ending of enmity, the making of peace in that sense. But it means more: not just the absence of war, but the positive presence of all the good things of life—peace and plenty and therefore enjoyment. And because it means that, it also means health. ‘What is your peace?’ is the standard Hebrew expression, even to this present day, for enquiring, ‘How are you?’

Peace then, the absence of war, the cessation of enmity; peace in the sense of peace and plenty and prosperity. Peace in the sense of health, both physical and spiritual, and therefore peace also in the sense of integration, wholeness. Just as in the New Testament, we find the word that means salvation also means to make whole. For God’s idea of salvation is not merely the forgiveness of our sins, but making us whole as men and women, integrating our personalities, leading us into true integration that is fellowship with God and fellowship with his people. And so we studied the peace offering as a picture of the sacrifice of Christ, who has made peace.

As we thought of the blood, we thought of our New Testament that says ‘he has made peace by the blood of his cross’ (1 Col 1:20)—the cessation of that terrible enmity that was in our heart against God. ‘While we were yet enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death

of his son' (Rom 5:10). So started that great process of integration. For us who believed, it ended the alienation from God. A human personality, unregenerate at heart, at enmity with God, is already on the way to perishing, already on the way to disintegration. We are creatures of God and to run counter to the will of God, to be alienated from God, to consider God really an enemy who's against our joy and blessing and prosperity, that is to ruin the very foundation of our personalities. That's why the Bible calls such people 'dead in trespasses and in sins', and on their way to disintegrate and perish. Oh, thank God for the sacrifice of Christ, by which our sin is forgiven, by which the holy wrath of God against sin is satisfied and we are reconciled with God and brought back into his presence with access into the holiest of all.

Then we noticed, as we studied, what you might call the algebra of these Old Testament symbols; that this peace offering speaks to us of the perfection of our blessed Lord in the matter of his trust and confidence in God, and we spent a moment admiring the marvellous faith of Jesus Christ our Lord, his personal trust in God. How even when he hung on the cross and the crowd went by and mocked him with his faith in God, even then, and even when the darkness came and he was forsaken of God, his faith remained unbroken. He held the whole universe of God together and, because his faith was unbroken, he was able to be our sacrifice and Saviour.

Restoring our confidence in God

As we fell to admiring the unbroken faith of the Lord Jesus, we reminded ourselves of what our blessed Lord is doing for us who trust him. He has not only made peace with God and done away with the enmity, he is beginning to make us whole again as personalities, by beginning to renew our confidence—what the Hebrew calls our 'flanks'—by drawing out our faith in God. As Romans 5 puts it, 'being justified by faith we have peace with God' (v. 1) and access into this grace and—now watch the confidence beginning to come back again, that basic confidence of the human personality—we joy, we exalt in hope of the glory of God.

What a renewing of our personality—personalities that have been divided and spoiled and disintegrated through sin, being renewed. This is the central confidence around which the personality is built and it's regaining its lost centre—anchored in God. And though we are imperfect still, we are forgiven and we may have confidence that one day we shall attain the very glory of God. As we struggle through life's battles, says Romans 5, 'We may have confidence, even in the face of tribulation' (v. 3). Why? Because we know that once there is faith in Christ, faith in God, then even tribulation shall not be allowed to break that faith, but tribulation will work endurance.

Then in Romans 5, we're told not only can we have confidence in our certain hope that we shall attain the glory of God and confidence as we face tribulation, but in all this we may have confidence in God himself—the very God whose justice condemned our sins. Once he seemed our enemy and seemed against us, but now our confidence is in him, not only in his grace, but in his very justice. We say 'hallelujah' that God is a God of justice, because he won't forever tolerate my sin and that means for me who trusts the Saviour, that God won't rest content until he has made me perfect.

So we noticed that the Lord Jesus gives us peace with God: no fear of judgment; certainty we shall not come into condemnation. And then he begins to build our confidence and put it back where it ought to be, in God. And then we found, as we studied the algebra of our typology, that the Holy Spirit pointed us to our Lord's inner motives and we fell again to admiring the Saviour. In Old and New Testament terminology, kidneys: 'I, the Lord, search the kidneys,' the inner motives of the personality, the desires of the personality, and we fell to admiring our blessed Lord. Although he was the Son of God, yet it is written that Christ pleased not himself, and his desire was to do the will of God: the will of him that sent him.

Restoring proper desires

As we thought of that, we thought of ourselves again and were grateful to God for the way that our blessed Lord, through his sacrifice, is beginning to restore our personality by dealing not only with our confidence, but with our hidden motives and our desires. For desire is an exceedingly potent part of our personality. You've seen many a man struggling with his business, and though his arthritis hurts him and he has difficulties galore, his heart is on that ambition and it holds him together. Then, when he's achieved his ambition and retired and has nothing else to do, he begins to disintegrate. The very desire out there in front, so to speak, united his whole personality as he followed that desire. Men and women away from God may have their temporary objectives outside themselves. Others put their objective inside: their desire is to please themselves. But if we make ourselves or this passing world our ultimate object of desire, in the end we shall disintegrate.

Our blessed Lord has done a wonderful thing for us, by taking our desires so that we no longer fashion ourselves according to our former desires in our ignorance. Just as he that has called us is holy, so we are exhorted to be holy, and our blessed Lord puts a great objective in front of us. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, 'But the love of Christ now it is that constrains us'—holds us together—'we judge that if one died for all, then all died and he died for all that they which live should no longer live for themselves, but to him that died for them and rose again.'

God has put this marvellous object before our eyes—a Saviour who died for us. Logic and gratitude would say that now my life's objective must be that I live for him. Is it not easy, at least to have a desire to do it? When I consider that I owe my life entirely to him and he died for me; now he's risen, I want to live for him. And the desire now to live for him out of love is not only serving the Lord but, whether we know it or not, as we desire and serve him, he's beginning to integrate our personalities. God forbid we should ever lose that desire and love for the Lord Jesus when, so far as we do, we begin to disintegrate.

Peace with myself

We thought of those things as we were studying the peace offering. As we come now to the law of the peace offering we shall be thinking not so much of the Lord Jesus—though of course we shall constantly be thinking of him—but we shall be thinking of ourselves and of some of the practical instructions that God gives us through these Old Testament priests. Not now as to how to make our peace with God, nor even how to obtain peace with God, but

rather how to develop peace and the enjoyment of peace in ourselves. There is a difference, isn't there? Haven't you found there's a difference? I certainly have. Thank God in his mercy I know what peace with God is and, because it is founded on the sacrifice of Christ, it's a peace that doesn't come and go. It is there all the time, absolutely fundamental and unquestionable and unruffled, because it rests upon the sacrifice of Christ and it does not, in that sense, depend on me.

But peace with God is one thing: peace with myself is quite another thing. I don't go through many days of peace with myself, do you? Perhaps you do, because you are a much superior person! But some of us know what it is not to have peace in our own hearts with ourselves, or with our circumstances. Though we might be heard singing that pardonable religious exaggeration, we're not H-A-P-P-Y all day long! At least I'm not. There's a bundle of contradictions within my personality, so that I have to say, along with Paul himself, 'Oh, wretched man that I am' (Rom 7:24). Peace with God still, but not always the peace of God in my heart. And I take it that in this law, God is giving the ancient priest and the ancient worshipper some practical instructions on how he might enjoy the peace and the plenty and the wholeness and the health that was available to him through this sacrifice.

Practising thankfulness

This sacrifice is unusual in this sense, that when a man offered a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord, some of it was given to God and burned upon the altar; some of it was given to the priest; and the majority of it was given back to the man himself that he might enjoy the result of this sacrifice. I take it that these instructions are about how you would enjoy it. And so we should notice one more thing before we come down to a few details. That this law is concerned especially with one particular type of peace offering—the offering that a man made to God as a thanksgiving offering.

Amongst the Israelites, you could offer a peace offering in order to put away sin, just as you could a sin offering. But you could come, if you wanted to, and offer a peace offering just out of the joy of your heart, to give God a gift. Not all sacrifices in Israel were for sin, as you will notice from the phrase that the Epistle to the Hebrews uses: 'A high priest is ordained to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin' (8:3). Now we're going to think particularly tonight of those sacrifices that a man in Israel might make as a gift because he wanted to thank God. We observe that that is the very first thing God says to the priest: 'Now if the man shall offer it for a thanksgiving.' Let's pause precisely there to pick up this practical emphasis on thanksgiving.

My brother, my sister, if you and I are going to enjoy practical peace of mind and health of mind, then we shall have to make it a very deliberate exercise to be thankful. That sounds very elementary, and I don't need to labour the point. It is our common duty to be thankful to God. I don't know about you, but I find it uncommonly easy not to be thankful. Sometimes I think it is because I am surrounded by such multitudinous blessings, I begin to take them for granted, and the thanksgiving goes. Then sometimes I think it's our unfortunate news reporters who fill our newspapers and television screens. You won't pick up your paper tomorrow and read that ninety-five per cent of the population of Bangor is a

law-keeping society; the fathers love their children and the mothers love their children and the children obey their parents. What delightful families there are in Bangor! But that wouldn't be news or get anybody excited. Let one teenager bash a policeman or something, that'll make the news. Isn't it curious?

I must be careful what I say, but sometimes it can happen even with the elect themselves. If you should be so fortunate as to get asked out to supper, on many occasions of course, they'll concentrate on the lovely things of God and they'll say, 'Brother, have you been enjoying Jeremiah recently? Now isn't the Lord wonderful?' I don't mean pie-in-the sky talk, but real down-to-earth enjoyment of the lovely things of God. But it could happen that what they'd talk about is, 'Have you heard about Mrs So-and-So?' and then comes a list. 'And have you heard there's trouble in that church up the way there?' We fill our minds with bad things and distressing things and sometimes with tainted things. Then we wonder why we don't have peace and why our worship on the Lord's Day is on a very lowly plane, and why our nerves get frayed. Says God, 'If you would be healthy and integrated personalities and know peace, get into the habit of thanksgiving.'

I envy those believers who wake up, forthwith jump out of bed and in two seconds they're singing the Te Deum and the bathroom resounds with their marvellous praise of the Lord. I was never built that way: it takes me a long while to open my eyes! I have to positively call upon myself like the psalmist did, 'Come on here, soul, don't stand in front of that mirror looking so glum—"Bless the Lord, oh my soul".' I've got to try and think what are the things I'm supposed to bless the Lord for: you've got them at your fingertips but I have to stop and think. 'Oh, yes, bless the Lord, oh my soul, forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquities.' That would keep you praising a long time, wouldn't it; that is if you've had many iniquities. 'Who heals all your diseases' (see Ps 103:2-3). Oh, how many things there are to thank the Lord for. Says this law, 'If you would practice peace, put this as your number one: to learn to give thanks.'

It's serious to get into the habit of not doing it. The Hebrews were a very honest crowd. They tell us in the book of Numbers that when God had spent a lot of time preparing them to cross the desert so that they might enter their glorious inheritance, almost as soon as they started out, they murmured. About what? Well the book of Numbers doesn't say, they just murmured. That's like us sometimes: you wouldn't know what we were murmuring about; it's just a habit we've got into. They murmured about the food, then about the drink, then about the servants of the Lord, Moses and Aaron. And presently God got angry about it. Why? If God isn't doing good enough for you now, it raises a very big question whether you want to go to heaven. Because if he's not doing good enough for you now, how do you know he's going to do good enough for you there?

If I can't be at peace with God, if I don't really trust him, if I don't really love him, if all the while I'm murmuring against God, saying, 'God, you could do better for me than this', then I'd better not go to heaven, because the love of God doesn't change. If he loves me at all, he loves me now. He'll not love me any more when I get home to heaven than he loves me now. Israel got into such a habit of complaining that when at last they got to the promised land, they complained against that and ran off. They didn't want to go in.

You say, 'Mr Preacher, it's alright for you to talk like that, you've had it easy in life. If only you knew how I've had it difficult. Do you not know the bereavements I've suffered? Do you not know the serious illness? Do you not know my difficult circumstances?' And you find it very difficult to thank God. 'In everything, give thanks,' says Paul (1 Thess 5:18). Oh, what a difficult thing. How can I do it when life is desolate and full of pain? If, like Job, the pressure of pain has become so intense and it all seems so unfair, and you can't see any rhyme or reason in it, you may wonder why God allows it, and allows so much.

In the end there is only one answer: that is in the sacrifice of Christ; that he who died for you was God's only Son. And I am taught to believe and to argue that:

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? (Rom 8:32)

My sister, my brother, if you can't thank God for the pain, if you can't thank God for the deterioration of your parent's mind, can you not bow before the Lord and tell him you can't give thanks for it; but that you dare to trust him, because he's demonstrated his love beyond doubt, in that he gave his Son to die for you? And so to trust where we cannot understand and to thank God that—in ways that we know not and shall not see until at last we get home—somehow he works all things together for good. Oh, dear believer, if there were no God, or if there were a God who doesn't love you, then your personality would be on the road to disintegrating altogether.

At peace—but not perfect

Secondly, I notice that if a man offered a sacrifice for a peace offering, he was exhorted to bring a whole lot of cakes with it, of various kinds. You will have noticed from our reading that some of them were unleavened and some of them, it explicitly says, were leavened. That has caused the theologians a lot of bother, because the theologians have started off with their symbolism, thinking in terms of 1 Corinthians 5, which interprets the injunction that the Passover bread was to be unleavened bread this way:

Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Let us keep the feast therefore, not with the old leaven of malice and hypocrisy, but with the unleaven of sincerity and truth. (see 1 Cor 5:7–8)

And they say, 'There you are, in the symbolism as Paul interprets it, leaven stands for that which is bad and corrupt.' And it makes sense when you're thinking of the sacrifice of Christ: there was no leaven about that whatsoever, for in him there was no sin. But says the theologian, 'How then in this particular sacrifice, could it be explicitly said that some of the loaves to be offered should be leavened? Has leaven turned to the good or something, on this occasion?' Well not necessarily.

If we look closer, we are talking about sacrifices of thanksgiving, not sacrifices of atonement. When the man came to give his sacrifice to God, it was his thanksgiving sacrifice and he gave his bullock, and he gave some unleavened bread along with some leavened bread. If I've got the symbolism right, the whole thing is a comfort to me. For what it says, to

me at any rate, is that as I come to God, I talk about Christ and he's perfect, and I recognise the wonder of God's work within me. But I say, 'Gooding, you know, there's still leaven inside you.' Isn't that true of you as well, or are you absolutely pure and spotless? Bits of hypocrisy still left, pretending? You should hear me pray sometimes in public, you'd think I was a saint. If you knew the whole truth, you'd say there's a bit of show acting there—a bit of hypocrisy, of pretending to be what I am not. And malice and a whole lot of ugly, corrupt things inside me. I say it to my shame; but what comforts me is that God recognises it.

You see, my dear brother and sister, if we're going to have true peace of mind, psychological peace, we shall have to let God teach us to be realists and face the fact that, even as believers, we're not one hundred per cent pure and holy and wholesome. I've got a little jealously left still. More than I think. We preachers are given to it. Well I'd better talk for the one I know best and that's me! You see the congregation or the conference praising one preacher more than another and then the one that isn't praised so much feels all in a huff. We might as well face the fact: we're jealous! If you don't face the fact that there's evil still within, it doesn't get rid of it. That just suppresses it. Presently, there comes a theological dispute among the brethren and they're not fighting as Christian men should fight. They're fighting like a lot of barbarians, bashing each other. If you ask them what the issue is, they'll say they're standing for the truth. Well perhaps they are, but it could be a little submerged jealousy coming out. If we would be psychologically healthy and enjoy wholeness and peace then, says God, we'd better recognise that we still have these ugly things about us, because if we're aware of them, we can begin to do something about them.

What a lovely realist God is. When he invites us to come to the Lord's Supper, to remember the Lord Jesus, and give thanks to God for the loveliness of Christ, notice that God doesn't say, 'Before you come, you must be sinless.' Of course not. None of us would come. But he does say, 'When you come, you must first judge yourself' (1 Cor 11:28). If you've never realised that in yourself there are still things amiss, your wife knows it and your fellow believers know it. You'd better recognise it, and by God's grace and by his word, begin to discern yourself and then judge yourself, and confess it to the Lord and seek to lay hold of his grace to overcome it.

Come to the Lord's Supper, not carelessly saying that it doesn't matter if I'm sinful, but not staying away because I can't come unless I'm perfect. Come in all realism, imperfect still, but confessing it to the Lord and laying hold upon the glorious promises of that new covenant that the cup of the covenant of the Lord's Day speaks to us of—appreciating little by little that God will save me and one day make me like Christ. So then, there is this matter of thanksgiving and, secondly, there is this matter of recognising that there is evil still within us; and yet with the assurance from the Lord that if we judge ourselves, he will not have to chastise us, and one day will deliver us from it completely.

Peace and fellowship

Then says the writer, if it were an offering of thanksgiving, 'the man must eat it the same day' (11:15). All the parts of the oxen that he gets back, he must eat the same day. If it is for a vow or a freewill offering, then he's allowed two days to eat it, but he mustn't eat it on the third.

What shall we make of that practical regulation? Well some have suggested that it is this: as the man took home this great piece of rump steak, so to speak, to a waiting wife and family, he had to eat it all that day, the same day as the sacrifice was offered, so as to remind the man that he owes that lovely meal to the sacrifice. He owes this great benefit to the sacrifice. He is in a sense sharing this with God, for God has had his part, his priest has had his part and now the man himself has his part. He's sharing it with God and that's the loveliness of it. It wasn't just the flavour of the beef that was so beautiful. It was, as he sat and ate it with family and friends, that he had a sense of fellowship with God through fellowship at that altar.

It's still important for our peace and wholeness, whether it be spiritual blessing or material blessing, that as we eat, as we enjoy our homes, as we enjoy friends, as we enjoy spiritual blessings in Christ, there should be that lovely sense that we get them because of the sacrifice of our Lord, and we enjoy them in fellowship with God. My dear sister, if that's a beautiful sprung settee you've got, may you enjoy the comfort of it for many years. I hope I speak no nonsense when I say that it will be even more comfortable if in the simplicity of your heart you say, 'I have it by God's grace' and you thank the Lord for it.

When we lose the sense that our blessings come from God himself and through the sacrifice of Christ and the mercies of God, life can become a hard thing and lose its highest dimensions. When we begin to lack the sense that it comes from God, we begin to lack the sense of fellowship with God and then we are in danger of going just for the thing itself and not getting complete satisfaction. If we start trying to get satisfaction by heaping up endless things without the Lord in them, that ultimately is a way to dissatisfaction. The highest thing about my benefits is they come from the Lord. I enjoy them in fellowship with him.

Sharing the blessing

I think there must have been another practical reason. Imagine if you'd brought a bullock for a peace offering or a vow and you got the biggest part of the bullock back, and you've got to eat it within two days. If you're going to do it by yourself, you'd have to sit up all night! How would you do it in two days? The sheer regulation forced you to do what was commonly done. If you'd offered a bullock to pay your vow, then you summoned all your neighbours and friends to help you eat the thing. As the psalmist puts it, 'I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied' (Ps 22:25-26). Thus our Lord has done when he offered his great sacrifice to God and he calls us, his people, to come and enjoy the blessings that come from that sacrifice.

As we eat and give thanks to God, God will say, 'Yes, but you'll have to share it.' With whom? With all God's people. For wholeness of personality means eventually that I shall have to do more than just enjoy the things of God by my little self. I shall have to be integrated into the fellowship of God's people and enjoy God along with all his people. Paul himself gives us a lesson on it in 1 Corinthians 10. He calls it the table of the Lord. He imagines us at the Lord's Supper, for instance, taking the loaf that's on the table and, as the loaf passes round, each one takes his little piece out of it, and when it has passed the last person in the room, the whole loaf has disappeared into the stomachs of those that have eaten it. Now says Paul, 'We started off with one loaf; where is the one loaf now?' You say,

'If you get the X-ray machines out, you'll find the one loaf, a little bit in each person.' So all the people there constitute that one loaf, because they have all partaken of one loaf, and so they are bound together.

That is the fact, my brothers, my sisters. You have come to Christ and you have received him and eaten the benefits that come from his sacrifice. So have I and, whether you like it or not, you and I are one. Christ in you, Christ in me. 'Yes,' says God, 'and I insist on it. You are to receive one another as Christ has received you.' To reject some genuine believer from Christian fellowship is a sad, sorry disobedience to the explicit word of God. How did Christ receive you, and on what terms? Not just as his social fellowship. Not just in a meal in the home. He accepted you to all the benefits of his great salvation the moment you repented and put your faith in him. As Christ has received you, God will demand that you receive your fellow believer. We celebrate it, don't we, in that lovely hymn that we sing so often at the Lord's Supper,

We would remember we are one
With every saint that loves Thy name⁹

Forgiving because we're forgiven

Integration, fullness, and if I would have the blessings of peace in my heart through Christ's salvation, then, says God, 'You will pass those blessings on.' Have you been forgiven? Then you must forgive. If I come to God as a believer and I plead with the Lord for forgiveness; that the Lord would ease his discipline of me because I've gone astray, and the Lord forgives me, then the Lord will require that I forgive my brother, as he repents. And if I don't, our Lord told a solemn parable to the effect that if I refuse to forgive, he will withdraw his forgiveness and put me through the prison of his discipline even more severely. God will not use his salvation to perpetuate my selfishness. God's salvation is given to me that I might learn health and wholeness and integration and fellowship with the Lord's people. My brothers, my sisters, we are all failing men and women and God has received us in spite of our failings. He asks us that we do the same to all believers in the Lord Jesus.

Cleanliness and commitment

That does not mean that we have to be careless of sin, for finally there are some other practical rules. I needn't stress them all or delay you. 'You mustn't eat it with your uncleanness upon you' (v. 20) says the word of God. If I would enjoy the things of the Lord and grow healthy in my mind and in my psychology, then I must not try to split myself two ways and be allowing myself unclean things. And where I find I've been tainted, let me hasten to confess; and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. But to think that I can go on in uncleanness quietly, and yet at the same time enjoy the great benefits and blessings of the salvation of God, that is an exceedingly dangerous presupposition. It has landed many a man eventually in disaster.

⁹ James G. Deck (1802-84), 'Lord, we would ne'er forget Thy love.'

‘Don’t you eat any fat or blood’ (vv. 23, 26). The fat is the Lord’s and the blood is sacred. It comes upon us sometimes in the pressures of life and we see the world enjoying themselves and our temptation could be to rob the Lord of what is the Lord’s, to increase what we think is our own enjoyment. Prayer gets lost and church fellowship goes by the board and our money goes on other things that should be going to the Lord himself. We think we’re increasing our enjoyment, but in the end it is a sure road to spiritual poverty. As our Lord said of Laodicea itself, ‘Rich and increased with goods; spiritually poor, miserable, blind and naked’ (Rev 3:17).

Giving others reason to praise the Lord

Finally, for our encouragement, the law says that when a man brought his sacrifice of peace offering to the Lord, certain parts of it went to the priest. I know you don’t believe in having special priests, nor do I for that matter. All of you are priests, thank the Lord for that. But just imagining myself in that man’s place in Old Testament days, I think as I walked down the road, back to hoeing my beans on the farm, or back to my ledger in the office, or my lathe in the factory, I should have felt glad that day. To think that I’ve given a bit of my bullock to that priest up there, and now he is praising the Lord for it. Isn’t that a lovely thought? Praising the Lord as a result of something I gave. Not only did I thank the Lord, but now that man is thanking the Lord. Isn’t that glorious?

I should go to bed tonight that little bit happier if I could think that something I did yesterday maybe, or was it last week, or even today—not merely as an expression of my thankfulness to the Lord, but something that I did—has got some dear saint nearer to God, living in the presence of God this night, and praising the Lord. Oh, what a lovely gift to give to God.

Paul went through tribulations galore, sufferings that left him on more than one occasion nearly dead. Says Paul, ‘You Corinthians have been praying for me, and God heard your prayer and delivered me. And all round the Roman Empire, there have been people praying for me, and now that God has brought me through those tribulations, there are people all round the Roman Empire and they’re praising God! Well then it was worth the suffering.’

It’s an expensive kind of way of living, isn’t it? But, my brother, my sister, for God to fill our hearts with joy and peace, and to save us and to make us whole, that also was expensive and accomplished by infinite suffering. Now we have a chance in this poor fallen world to show our gratitude to God, cost what it may, and to promote the praise of God in other hearts. I repeat, it is a lovely present to be able to give to God.

About the Author

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