

God Pleasing Worship Leviticus 1:1-9 2:1-3 3:1-2 7:11-15

One of the puzzling stories in the bible is the one about Cain and Abel - the first two human children born after the fall into sin. Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. Both of them began to worship God by bringing an offering to the Lord. Bringing an offering to God is the core of worship. Cain, the farmer offered some fruits from his crops to the Lord: and Abel, the shepherd brought fat portions from some of the first born of his flock. The bible tells us in Genesis 4:4 that the Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering but not with favor on Cain and his offering. We don't know why at this point in the story, and Cain didn't either. But it made Cain very angry and unhappy. And I guess he blamed God for his problems and his feelings of estrangement, his feelings of separation with God and his feelings toward his brother.

But God graciously comes down and said to Cain, "Why are you so angry at me and so unhappy with life, and so jealous of your brother? It's not me, it's you who is the problem. If you do what is right, if you do it the right way, this worship – this offering, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do it the right way, if worship is distorted, comes from the wrong place and done for the wrong reasons and focused on the wrong object sin is crouching at the door of your life and is ready to destroy your life, and your relationship with your brother and with God for good.

Cain and his children continued to worship God their own way. They went church shopping for worship that feels good, for worship that they liked and made them feel worthy. They let their desires control their actions and their lives. And after seven generations of this man-centered worship it says in Genesis 6:5 the Lord saw how great human wickedness had become on the earth, and that every inclination of human thought and heart was only evil all the time. The Lord grieved and God's heart was filled with pain. This is the result of distorted worship.

Human sin destroys our relationship with God, ruins our relationship with our selves, with others and with the creation, and this grieves God because human sin snowballs into widespread violence and corruption, and hatred and war and causes great human suffering. And that is not the way God meant it to be.

The book of Leviticus is the worship manual for the people of God. It is the book that helps people like Cain, and you and me do what is right, and be accepted and welcomed into the glory and grace of God through right worship, God pleasing worship, God designed worship. The book of Leviticus gives us a pattern of worship what ushers people into the blessings and presence of God as we saw in chapter 9, it guides us to worship in a way that leads to atonement, the cleansing of all our sins as we saw in chapter 16. In the book of Leviticus God reveals to us worship that restores a right relationship with God, ourselves, other and the creation.

Do you want to worship God the right way? Do you want to experience God's favor and God's love and God's grace over you? Do want the blessings of God to flow into all the areas of your life that sometime feel like they are cursed?

Well that is God's burden in the book of Leviticus. In 1:1 The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting. You may remember from Exodus 40 that the glory of God came down and filled the tent of meeting. God's presence came among the people, but the problem was no one could enter that tent of meeting, not even Moses. And at Christmas time we asked the question, What good is the glory of God, what good is the presence of God and the blessing of God if we can't get at them. If we can't experience them. Well Leviticus is God's answer.

And so God calls to the people from the tent of meeting and shows them the way in to his presence and his glory. There is way into a life with God that restores a right relationship with God, and self and with other and even restore our relationship with the creation. Its bringing your offering of worship in the right way. If you worship God in a God pleasing way it says in verse 4 it will be accepted, you will be accepted and worthy to enter the tent of meeting and experience God and his blessings.

In the first three chapters the pleasing aroma offerings are explained. The burnt offerings, The grain offerings, and the fellowship or peace offerings. These are the offerings, these are worship acts that are pleasing to God. This is the worship that opens up the tent of meeting and allows people into presence and glory of God. Now as New Testament people we know that Jesus fulfilled all these offerings and that the issue of right worship is not a matter of physically sacrificing animals and fruits. It has to do with orienting your heart and your mind and your strength. Its orienting your whole life in the right way to God. Through these offerings and liturgies God is retraining the human heart. With these instruction - these worship actions - God is capturing the hearts of people. God is training their hearts to focus their love on him and to trust him and allow him to heal them and cleanse them and bless them and restore their relationships with others.

So lets look for a few moments at each of these pleasing aroma offerings to see how they can inform our worship today.

With each of these pleasing aroma offerings the people are asked to bring something of value to God. That's what worship is bringing and giving worth to God, putting God first. Bringing something on which they could put their trust. Something we may need to stay alive. The prize animal, or the finest bag of flour, and the best bread. Bring something that is without defect, bring something that you consider the finest and bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting and give it to God.

The first offering described in chapter 1 is the burnt offering. Take that prize bull, that prize male ram in your herd, the one you think will sire your future and offer it to the Lord. Burn all of it. The burnt offering teaches us that right worship is the act of offering our best to God, our first fruits, our first borns, and that our worship costs us something. Mother Teresa used to say; in worship you give till it hurt. Now often we offer to God our left-overs, and we give so that it does not hurt and does not effect our life style. The burnt offering is our best, something we value, something that is costly and is wholly dedicated to God. This worship act patterns our heart in a way that restores a right relationship with God. That is the burnt offering, and its fire must be kept alive 24-7.

Paul, who has Leviticus memorized, says in Romans 12:1,2 I urge you, on the basis of this burnt offering pattern, in view of God mercy and glory to offer you bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. No longer conforming your heart and mind to the patterns and values of the world but orienting your heart and you mind to God's will, his good and pleasing and perfect will. Then says Paul you will be able to think properly about yourself, and use your gifts to serve others and love other as Jesus loved. That is the power of burnt offering worship, that's the aroma that pleases God.

The second offering is the grain offering. This offering is made by bringing the finest flour or the finest fruits of the harvest to God. When you come into the tent of meeting give it to the priests. The priest then take a handful of this offering, mix it with oil and incense and offer a memorial portion on the altar to be burned. This is the pleasing aroma part. The rest and the biggest part of this offering is then given to the priests. And notice what it says in verse 2:3. The rest belongs to the priests for them to eat. This part of the offering is the most Holy part. Offerings that please God are not just wholly given to God. This is how God provides for his ministers in the tent of meeting.

In other words, when we give our offering to God, God provides through them for the ministry and upkeep of the church. This is the most Holy part of our offerings. So you see our offerings and our worship given to God also trains our hearts and our minds to value the church and ministry of the church and ministers of the church. The church is God's preferred way of bringing healing and atonement and blessing into the lives of people. The church is the body of Christ, she is the presence of God in the world, and our worship and offerings should also honor and value the ministry of the church.

Paul, who had the whole book of Leviticus stored in his heart, says in his letter to the Philippians 4: 18 Your gift to me as a minister of the word, and your offerings to God for me and for the ministry of the gospel are a fragrant, an aroma offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And through this worship gift, God will meet all your needs and bless you with all the glorious riches in Christ Jesus. This is grain offering worship that raises a pleasing aroma to God. It is worship that restores a right relationship with others, and restore a right role for us in the creation and in culture. Worship is not just a vertical habit, it also is a habit and pattern that has relationship implication.

Finally, in that first speech of God from the tent of meeting God instructs the people in the dynamics of the fellowship or peace offering. The Shalom offering. The fellowship offering again is an animal and includes bread and cakes also. Something of great value. This animal must be without defect and the bread and the cakes must be made from the finest flour and offered at the entrance of the tent of meeting. But instead of the whole animal being burned, only the fat portions from the first born are burned. A big part of the animal is again given to the priest for them to eat and the remainder is eaten by the family and friends of the one who brings the sacrifice. This sacrifice we read in chapter 7 is offered as an expression of thanksgiving, or a vow or a free will offering. This worship is offered to God but the emphasis is on fellowship with others, creating peace with others. Celebrating a feast together and restoring right relationships with each other. The

Passover sacrifice and the Lord's supper celebrations were fellowship or peace offering celebrations. This was the sacrifice Abel made. He offered fat portions from the first born and best of his flock. The offering was made to God, to honor and love God, but it was also a prayer and a hope for the restoration of his relationship with his family and himself. Abel offered an offering that was done in the right way, for the right reasons, and focused on the right object.

A few years ago Adriana and I had the opportunity to go to Uganda and see the ministry of Hamlet and the effect of our offerings on the people in his village. Even though these people lived in poverty their worship was filled with joy. And what struck us especially was the offering. When it was time for the offering people from all over the congregation came forward with chickens, tomatoes, onions, corn, rabbits, goats and a few coins. Sometimes they even bring a cow. At the end of the offering the front of the church was laden with produce that resembled a market.

We here in North America, however, no longer have flocks and herds and orchards and gardens. So what do we bring as an offering to the LORD. What are you bringing today, what are you bringing this year that is of value to you, that is something you consider the best and are tempted to put your trust in? What are the pleasing aroma offerings God is calling you to make?

The final word God speaks in this worship manual in Leviticus addresses this question. Listen to God's closing words (Lev 27:30). "A tithe, 10 percent of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil, or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD. It is holy to the LORD. If a person redeems any part of the tithe they must add a fifth of its value to it (20%). The entire tithe of the herd and flock – every tenth animal will be holy to the LORD.

It is in and through our worship that God undoes the curse of sin and restores us in a right relationship with himself. Through worship God restores in us a proper sense of who we are as human beings. Through worship we come to realize again that we are children of God the father. Through worship we are again invited and included in the mission of God in the world and the mission of the church. Through right worship our relationship with others and our love for other is restored. Through worship we receive the blessings of God, and see and experience his presence.

And so even today God is calling us from the tent of meeting and says: don't be puzzled any more about how God's favor comes into your lives, Don't be angry anymore; don't be down cast and unhappy and jealous. If you worship in the right way, if you bring your offerings with hearts and minds that love God above all and your neighbor as yourself, your worship will be accepted, you will be accepted and God's favor will shine on you and God will give you peace.