

The Sacrifice of Praise

The inspired writer to the Hebrews spoke of the exalted position that we, as Disciples of Christ have:

“*we have an altar*, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the Tabernacle...”
(Heb. 13:10)

The teaching is plain: whereas the priests and Levites under the Law were given food from the sacrifices that were offered daily, this right gave them no legal entitlement to partake of the Christ-Altar. The Law gave them a legal entitlement to be sustained by the sacrifices – it was their “inheritance” (Josh. 13:14). But in Christ, we find grace and peace, the basis of acceptable offering being the sacrifices of a broken and contrite heart. So Hebrews 13 continues:

“... here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore, let us offer *the sacrifice of praise* to God continually: that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate [fellowship] forget not, for with such sacrifices, God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16).

One of the free will offerings under the Law of Moses was known as the sacrifice of Thanksgiving, or Praise. This was a form of Peace Offering – which along with the Passover – the offerer could partake of himself. In essence, it represented a meal of fellowship between the families that made up the people of God, and bound them in fellowship with their God. The allusion in Hebrews 13 is plain; we can partake of the Christ-altar, upon which we offer the Sacrifice of Praise, like the Israelites of old could partake of the food of the Altar offer the Sacrifice of thanksgiving. The difference being, that like the priests (referred to above), the people were given a legal entitlement to the offering, whereas the basis for partaking of the Christ-Altar is faith.

The way in which the various types of Peace Offering comprised a meal of fellowship between Israel and their God is seen in the Old Testament account. Leviticus 7 reads:

“the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day that it is offered ... but if the sacrifice of his offering be a vow, or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offereth his sacrifice: and on the morrow also the remainder of it shall be eaten” (Lev. 7:15-16)

This verse proves that the offerer ate of the Peace Offerings, being permitted to eat it for a certain number of days, depending on the precise nature of the offerings. Leviticus chapter 3 describes how the particular parts of the animal that comprised the Peace Offering was to be treated:

“And the priest shall burn it upon the altar: it is *the food* of the offering made by fire unto Yahweh” (Lev. 3:11)

So, the actual flesh of the offering was “the food of the offering”. Additionally, speaking of the house to come, Ezekiel was shown the altar for future sacrifice as “this is *the table* that is before Yahweh” (Ezek. 41:22). The language undoubtedly is that of a meal, the sacrifice being the “food” and the Altar being the “table”. But in this meal, Yahweh was served first: only after the sacrifice was made could the offerer take his share (compare the Law of the “firstfruits” – Num. 26:2).

THE FAMILY OF ELKANAH

In the passing of time, the situation became inverted, with man being served with God's portion. The first book of Samuel and chapter 1 recounts how a family went up yearly to worship and offer sacrifice to Yahweh. So we read:

“and when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Penninah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters portions: but unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah ...” (1 Sam. 1:4-5)

Here is a situation of a family in fellowship, going up to sacrifice and partake of the Peace Offering (how terrible it was then, that at this time of fellowship, Penninah, provoked Hannah to distress and tears because of her lack of children). We find however, that the priesthood had become corrupted to the extent that the priests took meat for themselves, before the sacrifice had been made:

“Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw” (1 Sam. 2:15).

The priests stole that which was Yahweh's (see also 1Sam. 2:13-14). At this meal, man was served first before God. We might see a similar pattern in the worship of many religious circles of our day. The supremacy of Yahweh is not held with the great reverence that He Requires: man is elevated, and the desires of the flesh are served first, and only when these are accommodated do men turn their attention to the things of the Spirit. Yahweh is a God of convenience, whose function is primarily to rain down blessings upon men, (but also to be blamed when something goes wrong) whosoever they be, and whatsoever 'faith' they believe in. Prayers before Him (the fruit of our lips) can become mere shopping lists of those things that we want from Him – this can happen with our own selves, as well as the apostasy. This, however, is not the Divine Way. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His Righteousness” (Mat. 6:33) is Christ's injunction, and serve Him first in all our ways.

KING DAVID

1 Chronicles and chapter 16 recounts king David's joy at the bringing in of the ark, and also what he did as a consequence:

“when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings, and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Yahweh, and he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine” (1 Chron. 16:2-3)

Notice the allusions here to the themes we have been examined: Both burnt and peace offerings were made, and a meal of fellowship was enjoyed. Yahweh was served first in the making of these sacrifices, and the entire Israel of God partook them, recognising that He had given all that they had.

There is another point in this chapter, which links with Hebrews 13, as cited above. Verse 4 of 1 Chronicles 16 reads:

“and he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of Yahweh, and to record, **and to thank and praise Yahweh**, God of Israel ... and he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of Yahweh ... Benaiah also and Jahaziel the priests with trumpets **continually** before the ark of the covenant of God (1 Chron. 16:4)

Compare the highlighted words of this quote with Hebrews 13:

“by him therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of **praise** to God **continually**, that is, the fruit of our lips, **giving thanks** to his Name” (Heb. 13:15)

Then the chapter continues to speak of fellowship:

“to do and to **communicate (fellowship)** forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb.13:16),

The sacrifices that please our Father in this dispensation are not the slaying of animals, but showing forth in prayers and hymns the fruit of our lips. This is what 1 Chron. 16:4 is teaching: those priests who were called upon to minister before the Ark were singers – that which gave God the glory was the fruit of their lips, singing and praising the Elohim of Israel. We would do well to question that which proceeds from our lips: whether what we say is governed by an inward digesting of the Word to the glory of our Father is something only we can say.

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

A principle linked to the concept of fellowship is the importance of meeting the needs of our brethren and sisters. The spirit of this is seen in the example of the Philippian ecclesia: this short epistle brings out many aspects of the Law, by alluding to Old Testament teachings. Philippians chapter 4, and verse 18 reads:

“but I have all and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, and odour of a sweet smell, **a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God**” (Phil. 4:18).

Notice here, the good deeds in making provision for Paul’s own personal need are likened to a sacrifice: it is a peace offering, a token of fellowship and oneness in the Lord. But what is particularly interesting in this connection, is what the Apostle writes in chapter 2:

“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all” (Phil. 2:17)

The marginal reference for “*offered*” indicates that the word is literally “*poured forth*”, as in a drink offering. What a wonderful bringing together of divine principles! The basis for all that we can offer is Messiah’s own sacrifice. He is the Burnt Offering: the entire carcass being consumed upon the altar. The Peace offering was placed on top of the Burnt offering, associating the offerer with that sacrifice, and upon the whole heap, was poured the Drink offering:- Paul is here likening himself to that drink offering, being poured out upon the basis of the Philippian ecclesia’s peace offerings. All were involved in a collective giving (peace offering) to meet Paul’s needs in order to continue his service (drink offering), and such a fellowship reflects the main principles of the Peace Offering.

When we turn to Leviticus 22, we find that imperfections were allowed to be offered as freewill offerings:

“either a bullock or a lamb that hath anything *superfluous or lacking in his parts*, that thou mayest offer for a freewill offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted” (Lev. 2:23)

In this, we behold a gracious accommodation by the Almighty. It is written that despite our imperfections: “truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 Jno 1:3). But we are not truly “without blemish”. We have an inward lacking of the things of the Deity, and we find ourselves doing those things that we ought not. We desire to fellowship with our Father and His Son: we seek to offer the sacrifice of praise – not perfect, but nevertheless accepted when offered with the humble and contrite hearts of true believers in Christ. Notice here, that the imperfections were only allowed for a “freewill offering”, but not a “vow”. We suggest that one reason for this, is that when we present ourselves before Yahweh of our “freewill”, (as distinct from obeying a legislation that commands it), He will recognise and overlook our imperfections. But when we make a vow, there is not to be any deficiency in the payment of it, and neither is there to be any extra: that which is vowed must be paid according to what was originally spoken.

1 CORINTHIANS 10

We began by showing that we have an altar to partake of, to which there is no legal entitlement. But through faith, we are permitted to come to it in order to offer and partake of our peace offerings. In our day, we follow the Apostle’s example of breaking bread together each Sunday as a memorial of the offering up of Messiah. This is the antitypical peace offering which was, topped with the meal offering (bread) and drink offering (wine). In this simple feast, we see so many principles converge. Speaking of it, the Apostle wrote:

“the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body, for we all are partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar ...” (1 Cor. 10:16-18)

Notice the comparison being made here: Israel could partake of the Sacrifice of Praise, and this eating united them in fellowship. But we are privileged to engage in a different fellowship meal of eating bread and drinking wine - memorialising our Master’s sacrifice in the patient waiting for his return. We come together each week to partake of these emblems, which comprise, in effect, our peace offering. Feeding upon spiritual principles, we sing our hymns and offer our prayers to the glory of our Heavenly Father – the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. In the partaking of these emblems of the love of God, we fellowship with each other:- but ultimately our fellowship is with Yahweh and His Son, whose ways we seek to make our own. Truly it is a wonderful thing to fellowship the Great Creator, Who has called us by His grace and mercy. In our fellowship, we recognise our imperfections, which are forgiven us by faith in the name of Jesus Christ.

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