

Introduction

When I was practicing law, I took the Metro bus to my office in downtown Akron. One day, as I entered the bus, I noticed that all the passengers but one had their faces buried in their sleeves. I soon discovered why. The one smelled so badly that it was literally a stench that nauseated us all. Some people – because of who they are and what they do – smell that way, metaphorically, to God. But what about us? How do we smell to God? We want to smell good to Him of course and Leviticus 1 teaches us how to do just that.

This chapter records instructions for one of the five kinds of Levitical sacrifice, the burnt offering, which was an animal sacrifice. It had five steps, each of which, as the New Testament makes clear, foreshadowed or pointed to one of two things: Jesus or our kingdom life with Him. Let's go through the five steps, in Leviticus 1:1-9, and learn what they teach us.

Step #1 (1:1-2)

The first, in verses 1-2, was that *the offeror brought an animal to the doorway or entrance of the tabernacle and presented it to the priest.* We know from verses 2, 10, and 14 what the animal had to be - an ox, sheep, goat, or for the poor, a turtledove or pigeon. Whichever of those it was, God required two things. It had to be a male and it had to be without defect. Without defect meant that it had to be physically flawless, without blemish or spot.

There was a reason for that. It's because the animal was a type that pointed to Jesus. 1 Peter 1:18-19 makes that clear. Peter alludes to Levitical sacrifice and describes Jesus as "**a lamb unblemished and spotless.**" The animal sacrifices had to be unblemished and spotless because Jesus would be. He called Himself the Son of Man, which means the quintessential man. He was humanity in its perfect, pure form.

John Ortberg wrote a book titled *Everybody's Normal till You Get to*

Know Them. None of us are normal in other words. Ortberg claims in fact that **“everybody’s weird.”** He compares us to the **“as is”** section of merchandise in stores. **“As is”** is a euphemistic way of saying **“these are damaged goods.”** There’s a stain that won’t come out, a zipper that won’t zip, a button that won’t butt, a moveable part that won’t move, and so on. It’s that way with humans. Humans are the **“as is”** section of the universe. Each and every one is flawed: a streak of deception, a wrongly passive spirit, a cruel tongue, a damaging temper, a self-serving ego, or a lustful habit, and on it goes. Nobody’s normal. We’re all **“as is.”**

But Jesus wasn’t. Imagine a perfect person. In terms of competence, he or she always knows what needs to be known and always does what needs to be done as best as it can be done. In terms of character, he or she always thinks, feels, wills, and does what is good and right. That was Jesus. He was humanity as God created and intended it to be. He was without blemish or spot and still is.

Step #2 (1:4)

The second step in the burnt offering is found in verse 4. *The offeror leaned his hand on the animal’s head.* In the Old Testament, leaning was a symbolic act that represented transfer. In this case, it represented that all of the offeror’s sins and the penalty of those sins, death, were transferred to the animal. The animal, in other words, became the offeror’s substitute.

Chuck Colson told a remarkable story about Al Quie. When Colson was in prison, Quie was a senior congressman from Minnesota. One day, Quie went before the federal judge who had sentenced Colson and made an astonishing request. He asked if he could serve out the remainder of his sentence for him. He told the judge that Colson’s family was in trouble and needed him and that he would gladly take his place in prison.

Al Quie demonstrated what the highest form of love is? It’s substitution. It’s one person being willing to stand in for another person and bear his or her suffering so he or she won’t have to.

That's exactly what Jesus did for us. What the animal became to the offeror in the second step, Jesus became to us on the cross. He became our substitute. He stood in for us – took our place. He took into Himself all of our sins and paid the penalty for them so that we wouldn't have to. Years ago in Akron, a mother's boyfriend, in a fit of rage, threw her three month-old daughter against a wall and killed her. Jesus became that man's substitute on the cross. Father God viewed and punished Him as if He were the one who did it.

That makes the cross experience of Jesus the most ironic event in human history. The only sinless person who ever lived became the most sinful person who ever lived – for you and me.

Step #3 (1:5)

Verse 5 records the third step in the burnt offering. *The offeror slew the animal "before Yahweh."* According to Exodus 20:24, "**before Yahweh**" meant at the brazen altar. You see that the offeror has moved. He performed steps #1 and #2 at the doorway of the tabernacle. But he performed step #3 at the altar, which was between the doorway and the tent of meeting. Going back to Exodus 20:24, the altar was a Holy of Holies in miniature, a place where God specially manifested His presence. Notice what the offeror did there. He killed the animal.

We switch gears in step #3. In steps #1 and #2, the animal was a type that pointed to Jesus. But in step #3, it was a type that pointed to we who follow Jesus. Romans 12:1, which uses four technical terms of Levitical sacrifice, makes that clear. It teaches that what happened to the animal at the altar must happen to us. In Yahweh's presence, which is always all around us, we die, not physically but spiritually and psychologically. We do that by living out this motto of Thomas a Kempis: "**As Thou wilt; what Thou wilt; when Thou wilt.**"

In the early 80's, during the cold war, the Mennonites held a conference to reexamine their traditional stand on pacifism. During an open forum, a young man stood up and shared why he was a pacifist.

While he was still standing, an older man across the room rose and challenged him. **“What would you do if the Russians came?”** he asked. **“Nothing,”** the young man replied. **“But if you did nothing,”** the older man said, **“They would take everything you have.”** **“No, they wouldn’t,”** the young man responded: **“Because I don’t have anything. When I decided to follow Jesus, I gave Him everything I had. It’s His. So if the Russians took it, it’d be His problem not mine.”** **“But if you did nothing,”** the older man declared, **“they’d take your life.”** **“No they wouldn’t,”** the young man answered, **“Because I’m already dead. You see, when I decided to follow Jesus, I died. My life is His.”** He then closed out the dialogue by saying this: **“That’s my freedom and release. You can’t do something to someone who doesn’t have anything and who is already dead.”**

What a powerful story that is. I’m not a pacifist, but that young man’s response shows us, generally, what dying in Yahweh’s presence is about. It’s making His will our will. Always and in everything, we will *as* He wills. We will *what* He wills. And we will *when* He wills.

Now, when we die in Yahweh’s presence, He in turn does two things to us, which the fourth and fifth steps in the burnt offering reveal.

Step #4 (1:5)

The fourth step is in verse 5. *The priest sprinkled the blood.* Notice it was the priest not the offeror who did step #4. He dashed the blood against the altar so that all four sides were spattered. Leviticus 17:11 reveals the significance of that, **“For it is the blood of the life that makes atonement.”** The Hebrew word translated **“atonement”** means **“to cover up.”** The meaning was that when the priest sprinkled the blood, it covered up the offeror’s sins from God’s sight.

Hebrews 3:1 reveals that the priest was a type that pointed to Jesus. Jesus is our great high priest. 1 Peter 1:2 and 1 John 1:5-7 reveal what one of His priestly ministries to us is. Whenever we repent of any sin, He sprinkles His blood, spiritually, and covers up that sin from

God's sight.

I once had a client who pled guilty to petty theft. At that point, the State of Ohio placed his name and crime in its criminal index. That meant that, in its eyes, he was a criminal, a thief. Three years later though, he hired me to file a petition of expungement for him, which I did. The judge granted his petition, whereupon the State of Ohio expunged or removed his name and crime from its criminal index. That meant that, in its eyes, he wasn't a criminal, a thief. Thus, if he were asked in a job interview or on an application if he ever committed a crime, he could honestly answer "**no.**" Legally, it was as if he had never committed the crime.

That helps us understand what happens when Jesus sprinkles His blood. Before I repent of my sin, I am, legally before God, a sinner, specifically a liar, a gossip, an adulterer, or whatever the sin is. But after I repent and Jesus sprinkles His blood, my legal standing before God changes. My sin is expunged. That means, in His eyes, I'm not a sinner. Judicially, it's as if I never even committed the sin. I am at that point, in God's view, as righteous as Jesus is. What an astonishing thing!

Step #5 (1:6-9)

That brings us to the fifth step in the burnt offering, in verses 6-9 - *the priest sublimated the animal's corpse on the altar*. Leviticus 6:8-13 reveals that the priests maintained a constant fire on the altar. But 9:24 reveals that it was God Himself who started it. It was His fire in other words and thus the sublimation of the corpse was His work.

"**Sublimate**" is an important word. The fire on the altar wasn't a hot fire that burned rapidly. It was a low fire that burned slowly and ritually instead. That's because of its purpose. It wasn't to destroy the corpse but to transform it into something better, That's what "**sublimate**" means. It means to slowly and ritually burn the corpse in order to transform it into something better.

Pulling that together, the meaning of the fifth step is this. When we

die in Yahweh's presence, submit our will to His, we're not only sprinkled but transformed as well. Yes, Jesus sprinkles us. But the Holy Spirit transforms us. He inhabits and works in our inner dimensions so that we increasingly think, feel, will, act, and react like Jesus. He makes us increasingly Christlike creatures in other words.

Conclusion

And that's God's favorite fragrance. Look at the last line in verse 9. The ritual fire transformed the corpse into something better – **"smoke"** that rose as **"a soothing aroma to Yahweh."** In 2 Corinthians 2:14-15, Paul takes this terminology of sacrifice and applies it to us. He says that we who are being transformed by the Holy Spirit **"are a fragrance of Christ to God."** **"Fragrance"** is a metaphor that pictures God smelling.

Consider two facts about our sense of smell. First, it's 10,000 times more sensitive than any of our other four senses. And second, it's the only one of the five in which our central nervous system is directly exposed to our environment. The other four sensory responses travel to the brain via neurons and the spinal cord. But this sensory response is immediate. It travels directly from the nose to the brain centers that govern thoughts and feelings. That explains why smells do that they do – trigger memories and emotions in us that are strong and deep.

That helps us grasp what it means to be **"a soothing aroma to Yahweh."** It means that we delight and please Him. Someone once asked me what my favorite cologne is. It's Brut. I'm a man of the 70's, I admit it. Anyway, all of us have our favorite fragrance and so does God. His is those who are becoming increasingly like Jesus, which raises a vital question in closing. How do you smell – to Yahweh? Die in His presence. Always and in everything, submit your will to His. You'll be a soothing aroma to Him – smell like Brut to Him – if you do.