

Introduction

I'd like to begin with a question. How many of you are wearing perfume or cologne? That you are reflects that all of us do want to smell good to people. But today I'm going to preach about something far more important than that – smelling good to God.

In Leviticus 1-6, God establishes five kinds of Levitical sacrifice: (1) the burnt offering (chapter 1); (2) the grain offering (chapter 2); (3) the peace offering (chapter 3); (4) the sin offering (4:1-5:13); and (5) the guilt offering (5:14-6:7). All of those, except the peace offering, involved an animal sacrifice. Those that did had five steps of sacrifice in common, each of which, as the New Testament makes clear, foreshadowed or pointed to one of things: Jesus or the Christian life. Let's go through the five steps, in Leviticus 1:1-9, and learn what they teach us.

Step #1 (1:1-2)

The very first of those steps, in verses 1-2, is that *the offeror "brings" an animal to the doorway or entrance of the tabernacle and presents 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 means 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. Jesus was the Son of Man, or as we would say it today, the quintessential man. That's the idea that "Son of Man" conveys. It conveys that Jesus was humanity in perfect, pure form.

John Ortberg wrote a book that helps us grasp this. It's 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 the very same way with human beings. Human beings 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. Just ask our spouses. The truth is that nobody's normal. We're all "as is."

Except Jesus. Imagine a person whose competence and character are perfect and complete. He never thinks, feels, or does what is evil or mistaken. And he always thinks, feels, and does what is good and correct. 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 Levitical sacrifice is found in verse 4. *The offeror leans 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 tells 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 him 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.

That demonstrates what the highest form of love is? It's substitution. It's a 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. That means that Jesus became what Paul called "the chief of sinners" on the cross. During the six hours He hung there, He was the most sinful person who ever lived. He made the likes of Ivan the Terrible, Adolph Hitler, and Osama bin Laden look like choirboys.

That makes the cross experience of Jesus the most ironic event in human history. Alluding to verse 1, the only sinless person who ever lived instantly became the most sinful person who ever lived – for you and me.

Step #3 (1:5)

Verse 5 reveals the third step in Levitical sacrifice. *The offeror slays the animal "before the Lord."* According to Exodus 20:24, "before the Lord" means at the brazen altar, which was between the gate and the tent of meeting. The altar was a Holy of Holies in miniature, a place where God specially manifested His presence. You can see that the offeror has moved. He performed steps #1 and #2 at the gate. But he performed step #3 at the altar. Notice what he did in that step. He slew, he killed, the animal.

We switch gears in step #3. In step #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 sacrifice, makes that perfectly clear. It teaches that what happened to the animal at the altar must happen to us. We must come into the Lord's presence and die, not physically but spiritually, morally, and psychologically. I have a handout on the table in the narthex that explains particularly how we do that. Generally, we do it by following this motto of Thomas a Kempis: "**As Thou wilt; what Thou wilt; when Thou wilt.**"

Back in the early 80's, 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 stood up and challenged him. **“What would you do if the Russians came?”** he asked. To which the young man replied, **“Nothing.”** **“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.”**

Wow, what a powerful story that is. That young man’s response shows us what dying in God’s presence is generally about. It’s surrendering everything that we are and have to Him. It’s yielding our minds, bodies, possessions, and purposes utterly to Him.

Now, when we come into God’s presence and die, He in turn does two things to us, which are found in the fourth and fifth steps.

Step #4 (1:5)

The fourth step of Levitical sacrifice is in verse 5. *The priest sprinkles the blood.* Notice it’s the priest who does step #4. He dashes the blood against the altar so that all four sides are spattered. Leviticus 17:11 reveals the significance of that. It says, **“For it is the blood of the life that makes atonement.”** The Hebrew word translated “atonement” means “to cover up.” The meaning is that when the priest sprinkles the blood, it covers up the offeror’s sins from God’s sight.

Hebrews 3:1 states that Jesus is our priest. 1 Peter 1:2 and 1 John 1:5-7 in turn reveal what one of His priestly ministries to us is when we

repent, both when we get saved and continually thereafter. He sprinkles His blood, spiritually not literally, and covers our sins 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 in its criminal index. That meant that, in the eyes of Ohio, 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 expunged or removed his name from its criminal index. That meant that, in the eyes of Ohio, 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 even 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, gossip, 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 was. What an astonishing thing!

Step #5 (1:6-9)

That brings us to the fifth step of Levitical sacrifice, in verses 6-9 - *the priest sublimates the corpse on the altar*. Leviticus 6:8-13 shows that the priests maintained the fire on the altar but 9:24 shows that it was God Himself who started it. It was His fire in other words and the sublimation of the corpse was His work.

"Sublimates" is an important word. The fire on the altar wasn't a hot fire that rapidly burned. It was a low fire that slowly and ritually burned instead. That's because the purpose of the burning wasn't to destroy the corpse but to transform it into something better, a soothing aroma to God. That's what "sublimates" means. It means to slowly and ritually burn the corpse to transform it into something better.

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

come into God's presence and die, we're not only sprinkled but transformed as well, into something better. Jesus sprinkles us. But the Holy Spirit transforms us. He inhabits and renovates the very ground of our being, the very core of our personality, and changes us. He slowly but surely and continually alters the way we think, feel, and will so that we become Christlike creatures, ones whose lives are abundant and full. The well-worn axiom "Christians aren't perfect; just forgiven" isn't true of us. We're a whole lot more than just forgiven. We're transformed.

Conclusion

And that's God's favorite fragrance. Look at the last line in verse 9. The smoke from the burning corpse rose as "**a soothing aroma to the Lord.**" 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.**"

The word "fragrance" pictures God smelling. Consider these two facts about our sense of smell. First, it's 10,000 times more sensitive than any of our other four. And second, it's the only one of the five in which our central nervous system is directly exposed to the environment. The other four sensory responses travel through the body via neurons and the spinal cord before reaching the brain. But this sensory response is immediate, extending directly from the nose to the brain centers that influence emotions and memories. That second fact explains an experience all of us have had. A smell triggers a strong emotion or memory in us.

That helps us grasp what it means to be "**a soothing aroma to the Lord.**" It means we stir His emotions and memories. We utterly delight and please Him in other words. Someone once asked me what my favorite cologne is. I replied that 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 being transformed. So let's come into His presence and die. We'll smell good to God if we do.