

Sacrifice 101

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 December 2021

Preacher: Benjamin Wilks

[0 : 00] So this evening we're going to read from Leviticus chapters 1, 2 and 3. Leviticus chapter 1, 2 and 3.

The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting. He said, speak to the Israelites and say to them, when anyone among you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

If the offering is a blessing, you may have a blessing of the Lord. You may have a blessing of the Lord.

You may have a blessing of the Lord. So that it will be acceptable to the Lord. You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.

You are to slaughter the young bull before the Lord, and then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall bring the blood and splash it against the sides of the altar at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

[1 : 18] You are to skin the burnt offering and clean it into pieces. The sons of Aaron will bring the fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.

Then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall arrange the pieces. Okay. Verse 8.

Then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat on the woods that is burning on the altar. You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar.

It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, you are to offer a meal without defect.

You are to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the Lord, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall splash its blood against the sides of the altar.

[2 : 36] You are to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat on the wood that is burning on the altar.

You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of them and burn them on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

If the offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, you are to offer a dove or a young pigeon. The priest shall bring it to the altar, ring off the head and burn it on the altar.

Its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. He is to remove the crop and the feathers and throw them down east of the altar where the ashes are.

He shall tear it open by the wings, not dividing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is burning on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

[3 : 51] When anyone brings a grain offering to the Lord, their offering is to be of finest flour. They are to pour olive oil on it, put incense on it, and take it to Aaron's sons, the priests.

The priest shall take a handful of the flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons. It is a most holy part of the food offerings presented to the Lord. If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of the finest flour, either thick loaves made without yeast and with olive oil mixed in, or thin loaves made without yeast and brushed with olive oil.

If your grain offering is prepared on a griddle, it is to be made of the finest flour mixed with oil and without yeast. Crumble it and pour oil on it.

It is a grain offering. If your grain offering is cooked in a pan, it is to be made of the finest flour and some olive oil. Bring the grain offering made of these things to the Lord.

[5 : 18] Present it to the priest who shall take it to the altar. He shall take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar as a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons. It is a most holy part of the food offerings presented to the Lord. Every grain offering you bring to the Lord must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in a food offering presented to the Lord.

You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of the first fruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma. Season all your grain offerings with salt.

Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings. Add salt to all your offerings. If you bring a grain offering of first fruits to the Lord, offer crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire.

Put oil and incense on it. It is a grain offering. The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and the oil, together with all the incense as a food offering presented to the Lord.

[6 : 46] If your offering is a fellowship offering, and you offer an animal from the herd, whether male or female, you are to present before the Lord an animal without defect.

You are to lay your hand on the head of your offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall splash the blood against the sides of the altar.

From the fellowship offering, you are to bring a food offering to the Lord. The internal organs and all the fat that is connected to them.

Both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the long lobe of the liver, which you will remove with the kidneys. Then Aaron's sons are to burn it on the altar, on top of the burnt offering that is lying on the burning wood.

It is a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. If you offer an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the Lord, you are to offer a male or female without defect.

[8 : 01] If you offer a lamb, you are to present it before the Lord. Lay your hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the tent of meeting. Then Aaron's sons shall splash its blood against the sides of the altar.

From the fellowship offering, you are to bring a food offering to the Lord. It's fat, the entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone. The internal organs and all the fat that is connected to them.

Both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the long lobe of the liver, which you will remove with the kidneys. The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering presented to the Lord.

If your offering is a goat, you are to present it before the Lord. Lay your hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the tent of meeting. Then Aaron's sons shall splash its blood against the sides of the altar.

From what you offer, you are to present this food offering to the Lord. The internal organs and all the fat that is connected to them. Both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the long lobe of the liver, which you will remove with the kidneys.

[9 : 22] The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering, a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the Lord's. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.

Wherever you live, you must not eat any fat or any blood. Amen. Thank you, Paula. That's a long chunk there from Leviticus 1 through 3.

Two reasons for doing that. One, Leviticus is 27 chapters long, and we don't want to take 27 weeks to make our way through it, so we're taking larger chunks.

The second reason is that kind of litany of if you bring this, if you bring that, you do this with the blood, you do that with the grain, it kind of conveys some of the sheer number of sacrifices that are being brought by these people day after day after day.

The lamb, the goat, the bull, the grain. Day after day, all of these things are piling up, and we'll think more about why that would be in a few minutes' time.

[10 : 30] I wonder how you go about getting to know someone. If you know somebody a little bit and want to know them better, you want to improve the quality of your relationship. If you want to put more Bible-y language on that, how do you increase fellowship with someone?

My suspicion is that if that's your objective, I could be wrong, but I imagine your first instinct would not be to think of shed blood as the means to achieve that objective.

But we said last week, didn't we, that the objective of Leviticus is to answer that question. How do we have fellowship with a holy God? Leviticus provides that path to fellowship.

So why, as the blood begins, sorry, as the book begins, is it all about sacrifice? Three chapters of it we've read this evening, and there's plenty more sacrifice to come. Why so many animals being killed, so much blood poured out, so much flesh burned?

Well, the first thing we have to remember is that this is about fellowship with God, not about fellowship with other people. We get into all kinds of trouble, don't we, when we start to assume that God is basically like us, just a whole lot bigger.

[11 : 40] Not, not just quantitatively better than you or I, not just more of the same, and in fact, I'm not convinced that even talking about God being qualitatively better than you or I really goes far enough.

He's not just an improvement by a few notches on the scale of morality or whatever scale you might be considering. No, God is holy and completely distinct.

Theologians sometimes talk about the creator-creature distinction. It's sometimes helpful to categorize things within the created world. Biologists find their taxonomies very useful, and theologically too, we can distinguish within creation, not least human beings made in the image of God and other animals that are not.

But even more fundamental than that distinction, more fundamental, I think, than any other separation I can think of, more fundamental is the distinction between God and literally everything else.

Only God is eternal. Only God is self-existent. All other things have a beginning. There was a time when they were not. All other things are contingent, dependent for their existence upon the actions of another, the actions of God himself.

[12 : 59] So you and I, as we sit here this evening, you and I, in common with all other created things, which is to say, in common with everything and everyone, but other three persons of the Holy Trinity, all things depend moment by moment upon the sustaining work of Christ.

Therefore, if God is fundamentally different to you and I, then it shouldn't be a surprise to us that when he sets the agenda, it's not necessarily the agenda that we would have chosen.

When he lays down how something's going to go, it might not be the path that we'd have gone for left to our own devices. So the objective of the book of Leviticus is to lay out a road map, to make provision for fellowship.

So why does that path run through so much sacrifice and blood? Well, because God is not like you and me. He is holy.

God is perfectly holy. And that's why the path for us who are not holy, to have fellowship with him who is, that path is not straightforward.

[14 : 07] His perfect holiness means there's a gulf between him and his people. Moses, the chosen mediator, can't enter the tent because of the weight of God's glory.

We're saying it just now in Psalm 24. Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart. Who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

But who has such things? Who is truly pure? Who can say that their trust is truly in God alone and not in any idol, whether idols, ancient or modern.

Who may stand in God's holy place? Well, he himself will have to tell us both the who and the how. And he does. He sets it out right here in Leviticus.

The whole of what Paul had read for us this evening, the whole of it is direct speech from God himself. Chapter 1, verse 1, the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him. And God doesn't stop speaking for quite some time.

[15 : 08] 38 times in the course of these 27 chapters we're told the Lord spoke to Moses. It's more of God's words here than any other book of the Bible.

I mean, all of the Bible is God's words but more of God's direct speech, if you like, than any other book of the Bible. So what path does he lay out? If we want to understand this path, we have to get clear in our minds the all-consumingly destructive force of perfect holiness towards anything that does not share that holiness.

Perfect holiness cannot coexist in the same space, if you like, with that which is unclean, impure, unholy. Anything or anything wanting to cross that divide from the common realm, from the everyday, if you like, from what's properly called the profane, from that realm into the holy realm, into the presence of God, anything wanting to make that leap has to itself become holy.

And the means of making that leap, the means of becoming holy, the means of approach at this stage, at least, has two major components to it. There's the sacrifice legislation that we're presently considering and then the second component will be the priesthood.

And then once the nature of those two elements, sacrifice and priesthood, has been set out, that's chapters 1 through 8, then the narrative can move on and chapter 9 will see Moses and Aaron then able to enter the tent at long last.

[16 : 39] And that then, with those provisions in place, will then be the closest relationship between God and a human being since the days of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But just as the cherubim and the flaming sword barred the way into Eden, well there's still the cherubim guarding, embroidered on the wall, symbolically guarding the most holy place.

What we get so far is entrance into the tent, into the holy place. This isn't quite going to be all the way just yet. So that's why I say this is the means of approach at this stage.

This that we're looking at now is sort of a prerequisite, if you like. Step one of the process, not the completion of the process. If you want to be a doctor, you do have to study for a higher-end biology.

But that's not sufficient in itself, is it? The biology is the prerequisite that grants entrance to the medicine degree that we can more fairly describe as the means of becoming a doctor.

So the goal is fellowship with God. God's perfect holiness means communion with him requires total consecration. But before you can think about that consecration, first the sins have to be dealt with.

[17 : 54] Expiation is the prerequisite for consecration, which is the means of fellowship. Don't worry, there are less technical ways of putting that and we will go through some of that.

But we have this process to go through. So this route to God, according to commentator Michael Morales, he says, the route to God is through a bloody knife and a burning altar.

Sacrifice is God's own chosen way for humanity to dwell in his presence. And these first three types of offering that we're thinking about this evening, each of them, they take up one chapter, they're united by the fact that each is described to us as a food offering and aroma pleasing to the Lord.

The following chapters then have the sin offering and the guilt offering and they're not described in that way. So that gives us these kind of two major categories, these ones described as food offerings and the others that aren't.

And you probably think that within those categories you'd have, I don't know, a chronological order to how they're laid out, you know, the typical day of sacrifices, but that's not how they're set out for us here in Leviticus.

[19 : 02] The offering of chapter one doesn't come first in the day, but is described first probably because it's sort of the fundamental offering, if you like. This is the baseline from which all the others derive.

This first offering, the burnt offering. Now within this category of burnt offering, there's then a few different options. Verse three, if the offering is a burnt offering from the herd.

Verse 10, if it's from the flock. Verse 14, if of birds. Variation perhaps because different people might have different animals available, but probably more importantly variation because that represents a range of costs.

You know, you have the cattle that are most expensive, the sheep, and then the birds. God's desire seems to be that even those who aren't at all financially well off are able to bring a sacrifice within this category of burnt offering.

But also, not just that the least well off can bring something, but that those who have the wherewithal to bring the more expensive things are able to do so.

[20 : 08] Why? Well, because a sacrifice is supposed to be a sacrifice. It's supposed to be giving something up. It's supposed to cost something. God doesn't want to impoverish people, but the offering should be costly.

There's no rules given for who should bring which, but it's not hard to imagine that the person bringing the offering, the priest, the onlookers, they all know well enough which category that person ought to be fitting into.

So on the one hand, you have David in 2 Samuel 24, David adamant it would be wrong for him to bring an offering that didn't cost him something. And yet, if you want to take another angle on it, well, we see that Jesus' own mother, when she brings a sacrifice following his birth, she brings the birds.

She brings the offering for those who can't afford a lamb, Luke chapter 2. So there can't be anything deficient in these less costly sacrifices, or they wouldn't be appropriate for Jesus' mother to bring.

So we have this range, cost, but provision for everyone. But within each category, whether it's from the herd, from the flock, or the birds, within the categories, God demands the best.

[21 : 22] Verse 3, a male without defect. The same verse 10, if you're bringing a sheep or a goat, a male without defect. And interestingly, the word that here is translated without defect, we translate that same word as blameless when we apply that word to human beings.

So the physical perfection of the animal is emblematic of a sort of moral perfection. You know, the sheep doesn't have actual moral perfection or otherwise, but its physical perfection images represents moral perfection.

Chapter 22 will clarify some of what constitutes defects, and the prophet Malachi has scathing words for those who ignore this stipulation. It matters to God that the best is brought, that it is without defect, that it is symbolically blameless.

And that shouldn't surprise us. I mean, it shows a pretty offensive attitude of heart, doesn't it? To bring a beast with known faults. I mean, that shows that the bringing of the sacrifice has shifted from being a delighted response to God's goodness, has shifted away from being a desire to give him our best, has shifted into trying to get away with the least that we can.

Think about the difference between choosing a gift for someone who you love, hopefully most of us are doing that at the moment, the difference between that and paying taxes to an oppressive government.

[22 : 53] Which of those attitudes should match up with what's going on in the bringing of this sacrifice? It's supposed to present the love of that one towards God.

So step one, you select your animal and you present it at the entrance to the tent. Next up, verse four, the worshipper lays his hand on the beast's head. The Hebrew word here is actually a little bit stronger than lay.

It's not a sort of, but more of a oppressing almost. Not just a light and momentary contact, something more significant. Being implied by this action seems to be not just a claim of ownership, we already know it's your lamb, you brought it, but rather it kind of conveys identification with the animal.

See, the person bringing the sacrifice can't himself ascend God's holy mountain, but he symbolically does so through this blameless and holy substitute. By identifying with this beast, he then symbolically ascends.

And having declared in this sense, I am this animal, the very next act, he kills it. you slaughter the animal. And the worshipper does that himself.

[24 : 08] It's not handed over to the priest, no, the person bringing the sacrifice is very much involved. And by doing that, he implies that he himself is willing to die.

Indeed, he recognizes that he deserves to die. In the place of the sinful man, this blameless substitute is sacrificed. There is no atonement without death.

And we're told, verse 4, atonement is the explicit purpose of this sacrifice. So this burnt offering is one element in the restoration of the previously broken relationship with God.

It's one thing. Beyond that, we might usefully note that in this sacrifice and in this one alone, the whole animal, apart from the skin, the whole animal is burnt up. The whole thing ascends as a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

The entire animal given over to him. Whereas when we come to the grain offering, just a memorial portion is burnt and the rest is given to the priest. And the fellowship offering, chapter 3, part's burnt, part goes to the priest and the most of it is eaten by the worshipper and his family and friends.

[25 : 17] But this one, this one is wholly consumed by the fire, emblematic of total consecration to God, holding nothing back. The whole life is sacrificed to God in total obedience.

Very likely, this is what's behind Paul writing in Romans 12 and linking back to this offering and admonishing believers to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, because this is our true and proper worship.

Let's go back to that idea of atonement. How does this sacrifice atone? Now some of you are perhaps saying to yourselves, Spence, we've read the New Testament. We know this isn't the whole story.

Sacrifices don't actually deal with sin. Hebrews 10 is very clear. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties.

Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. Well, if that's what you're thinking, good, you're right. In all our consideration of these Old Testament sacrifices, we do need to have in the back of our minds that this isn't the full picture, that God has spoken a fuller and better word.

[26 : 37] But that doesn't mean the sacrifices are irrelevant. John Currid puts it like this, Old Testament believers were not left without hope.

For the Old Testament sacrifices were shadows, types of the atoning work of Christ. And these people obtained forgiveness and acceptance with God only as they offered in true penitence and faith in the coming Redeemer.

They trust that one is coming who will really take away sins. And we, therefore, as New Testament believers, come to God ultimately on exactly the same basis as did Moses and the people of Israel.

We come by our faith in the Redeemer. Yes, no longer we're called to bring our own sacrificial animal because Christ's eternal, permanent, and fully sufficient sacrifice has been made.

Remember, it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

[27 : 45] But so, too, as these sacrifices in Leviticus were designed to be to God a pleasing aroma, well, so we're told in Ephesians 5, Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

So, Christ fulfills this burnt offering. He provides the one final and sufficient burnt offering. That's the burnt offering.

We're going to take a quick look at the grain and fellowship offerings, chapters 2 and 3. Don't worry, these are a little bit briefer because we've covered quite a bit of the ground already. Chapter 2, the grain offerings. Again, we're given a variety of options.

Do you bring just the flour? Is it roasted? Is it baked? Is it cooked on a grill? Whatever it might be. Well, there's a less clear kind of reason for the divisions, isn't there?

They're no longer kind of organized by value. But it's interesting in what things there is variation and in what no variation is permitted.

[28 : 48] So, for instance, you do have this number of different cooking options, but they all have in common no yeast, no honey, there must be salt, and perhaps most importantly, whether it's provided raw, baked, cooked on the griddle, in a pan, in all cases, they are to be made of the finest flour.

Again, God expects the best. I mean, why would it be otherwise? Because the purpose of the grain offering is thanksgiving to God, especially thanksgiving for God's provision.

Whether that's a kind of particular extraordinary provision, you bring this offering when God has given you something particular in thanksgiving for the birth of a child, in fulfillment of a vow, for particular reasons you give thanks to God by bringing this offering, but it's also the ordinary and the day-to-day, the things that happen time after time.

It's part of the daily offering, and each year, harvest comes around. Verse 14 talks about offering first fruits to the Lord. This is the time of harvest. You start to gather the grain in from your fields, and you bring some of the best of that initial harvest to God, thanking Him for the fact that there is a harvest.

So bringing this offering, it reminds the worshiper time and time again that God is the giver and sustainer of life. Particular seasons, every morning, every evening, day after day, God is the one who provides.

[30 : 22] Now again, you and I, we aren't called to make these same physical sacrifices in this way, but we acknowledge the same reality. We still recognize God as the provider, God as the giver and sustainer of life, God as the one who provides all that we need.

And it's not improper that part of how we recognize that is practical, measurable. Bringing a portion of the grain reminds the Israelite that all of his grain is a gift from God.

God. And I don't think it's a stretch to say that giving a portion of our paycheck each month to God's service in some way should be reminding us of this similar truth, that God has provided the fullness of that money.

So we bring it not as a grudging obligation, that wouldn't be acceptable from the Israelite either, but we bring it as a delighted response to what God has done. And I think this comparison is particularly applicable when we recognize that the other common feature of these set of grain offerings is that only a small portion of this offering is burned.

The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and to his sons. Remember the tribe of Levi, the Levites have no land to farm. Each other tribe is given this is your patch of land, these are your cities, and you eat what the land grows for you in trade and whatever.

[31 : 52] The Levites have no land. So God makes provision for those who are dedicated to his service in this alternative way. This is the major part of what the Levites have to live on, the grain and the other offerings that are brought.

From the abundance that God has bestowed upon the whole of his people, it pleases God to have some of the finest flour provided to those who are set aside as holy in his service.

So as people like Catherine in Spain, Duncan in Glasgow, Suraj in Nepal, as they dedicate themselves to God's service, it is fitting that we are part of his means of making provision for them.

And I'm glad that for the past years we've prioritized doing that as a regular monthly payment from the abundance that God gives to us as individuals and as a fellowship. And I'm pleased that at particular times we can make an additional offering.

We'll be looking when we come to next year's budget, whether we can increase the amount that we give these people. And I hope we can, because Leviticus chapter 2 and plenty of other similar passages, they show us this principle that God normally provides for those who serve him by means of the ordinary economic activity of his people at large.

[33 : 11] Whether that's tilling the soil, running a business, working a cash register, whatever it might be, God provides for all of his people and from that abundance expect some to be dedicated to those who serve him in a particular way.

So I hope that we'll be able to do more of that in the future. Finally, the fellowship offering, chapter 3. The idea behind this offering, as the name might imply, is that of fellowship in all of its fullness.

It represents that fellowship with God. principally, this fellowship between God and man, though there is also a kind of interpersonal dimension. Fellowship, peace.

This is our old friend, the Hebrew word shalom. That's more than the absence of war, more than the removal of enmity. Shalom means health, prosperity, abundant life, overflowing goodness, God's salvation in all of its fully orb'd glory.

This, this sacrifice represents living communion between the fellowship, the worshiper and God. And that's represented by another shift in what's done with the offering.

[34 : 26] We have the one entirely burnt up, completely dedicated to God. Then we had one from which a small portion is burnt, and the rest is given to the priest and his family. Now we come in this fellowship offering to an experience that begins the same as the burnt offering, with the absence of the defect, the laying on of the hand, the slaughter, the splashing of blood.

But then we find only part of this one is to be burnt. Specifically, the Lord claims, as his, he claims, a variety of choice parts, particularly all of the fat.

Again, God expects the best for himself. And we're not told here in chapter 3 what happens to the rest of the animal. But if you look ahead to chapter 7, we find that the breast of the animal and the right hip are given to the priest.

That's chapter 7, 31 to 33. And then the rest of the animal is eaten by the one who has brought the offering together with his friends and family as he chooses to distribute it.

As Deuteronomy 12 puts it, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your family shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

[35 : 35] I mean, God's perfectly clear. Psalm 50, he does not eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats. But still, this sacrifice concludes with this meal. This meal in which God does symbolically participate.

Some of the food is burnt on the altar. But more than that, this meal in which God acts as the host. God's presence is near. So this fellowship offering prefigures the day when, as Psalm 23 puts it, he will prepare a table before us in the presence of our enemies.

He will anoint our heads with oil and our cups will overflow. We will one day feast in the house of Zion. But on that journey of this fellowship offering from Leviticus through to that last day of full feasting, there's another important step along the way.

Because the fellowship offering has really clear parallels to the Lord's Supper. We call it communion because it's symbolic of peace and fellowship with God. Jesus called the cup of wine the new covenant in my blood.

His death on the cross has closer parallels to the burnt offering and to the day of atonement, to the fully consumed sacrifice. But the Lord's Supper is a meal, just like this fellowship offering, as we come and share fellowship with our God.

[37 : 01] one vital similarity between the two, that fellowship requires the spilling of sacrificial blood. There is no peace without the shedding of blood, whether it's the lamb that you have brought or the lamb that has been slain on our behalf.

A vital similarity. But there's also a vital difference that Gordon Wenham explains very helpfully. He says, the most striking contrast between the old peace offerings, is in the use of the blood.

Under the old covenant, the drinking of sacrificial blood was sternly prohibited. You do not consume that blood. It is poured out on the sides of the altar.

But under the new covenant, it is expressly commanded. Yes, under the guise of wine. It is blood that makes atonement for sin. And by drinking that blood, the Christian is constantly reminded that he is saved by God and not his own efforts.

The Old Testament tells us the life enshrined in the blood is sacred because it is God given. And man has no right to take that God implanted life.

[38 : 15] It has to be returned directly to its creator. But now, in this New Testament era in which you and I live, this atoning, life-giving power may be drunk by the creature to purge him of his sins and assure him of God's salvation.

And the Lord's Supper should therefore be, like this peace offering, this fellowship offering, should be at once a solemn and joyful occasion. Solemn because no human being can light-heartedly enter God's presence and pledge to keep God's laws.

Joyful because God's grace and his promise exceed all that we can ask or think in this life and the next.

To him be all glory, honor, and praise. Amen.