THE FELLOWSHIP OFFERING

Leviticus 3:1-7

Key Verse:3,4

“From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the LORD by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.”

Thank God for the truth of the grain offering that excellently shows the life of Christ Jesus characterized by fine flour, oil and incense. With deep gratitude for the grace of the burnt offering Jesus, may we follow his footsteps, putting effort into grinding our sinfulness and for our hearts to be purified into fine flour, living by the Spirit. Today’s passage is about the fellowship/peace offering. In this offering, we see God’s heart’s desire to have fellowship with men through reconciliation in Christ Jesus. He wants his people to share in fellowship with him, feasting among them. This fellowship offering portrays the kingdom of God. May we come closer to the heart of the LORD God.

Verse 1 says, “If someone’s offering is a fellowship offering, and he offers an animal from the herd, whether male or female, he is to present before the LORD an animal without defect.” For the fellowship offering, God accepted an animal, male or female, but without defect. God is holy and righteous, gracious, and considerate.

Then verse 2 says, “He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides.” For the burnt offering, the priests were to sprinkle the blood all around the altar to make atonement for sinners to be forgiven and accepted by God. For the fellowship offering, Aarons’ sons, the priests, were also to sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides. What is the meaning of this? Colossians 1:19-20 says, “God was pleased…through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” How precious and powerful the blood of Christ shed on the cross is! Through his blood, we were reconciled to God. Paul said in Romans 5:10 that we, who were God’s enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of his Son. So we have peace with God in Christ being justified by his blood (Ro 5:1, 9). And Ephesians 2:13 says, “Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.” This is the foundation of the fellowship offering, and so also is it the basis and core of our fellowship with God and our fellowship with one another.

And in verses 3-5 it says, “From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the LORD by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.” To bring a sacrifice made to the LORD by fire is specific to the fellowship offering. It is also written in verses 9-11 in the case of offering a lamb, “From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the LORD by fire: its fat, the entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone, all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made to the LORD by fire.” Here we see the sacrifice to the LORD is food to Him. And it is again written in 14-16 in the case of offering a goat, “From what he offers he is to make this offering to the LORD by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the LORD’s.” Again, food is mentioned. This is a unique expression in the Bible. It is as if God can eat the food. We know that eating food/having a meal together means close fellowship. The expression of food shows how much God wants to have fellowship with his people. A very interesting thing is written in Exodus 24:9-11, “Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of Israel; they saw God, and they ate and drank.” This is the description of the heavenly table at which God and the leaders of Israel had fellowship together at the table God prepared. Actually, in Genesis 18, the LORD came down in human form with two angles and visited Abraham’s house, sharing the food Abraham and Sarah had prepared (Ge 18:1-8). We also remember that the glorified risen Jesus prepared a breakfast and ate with his disciples at the beach of the Sea of Galilee (John 21:12). In reminiscence of this event, John wrote the words of the risen Jesus in Revelation 3:20, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and he with me.” Thank the LORD God who really desires to have fellowship with human beings made in his image.

Here we are to know that the fat, the kidneys and the liver are valuable inner parts of the animal. When we think of the fat, we remember that Abel offered God fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock (Ge 4:4). “Fat” is in Hebrew *cheleb*, and some translate it as the best portions. In chapter 3, the word “fat” is written 12 times, including the fatty lobe of the liver, here translated the covering of the liver. And they say that in verse 9 “the fat tail cut off close to the backbone” is very nutritious and delicious, nowadays served for special guests. We know that we need fat for energy in our body, particularly when we exercise. Fat is also necessary for our brain, eyes, and skin to function. Here in 3:16, we see that all the fat belongs to the LORD’s. “Kidney” is in Hebrew *kilyah*. Interestingly, this same word is used in Psalm 139:13, “For you created my inmost being/my innermost parts (NASB); you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” “Innermost parts” is *kilyah*. It is also written in Psalm 7:9, “…the righteous God tests the hearts and minds,” where minds is *kilyah*. And Jeremiah 11:20 says, “But, O LORD, Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind…” Here “heart” or “mind” is *kilyah*. One thing is clear – that when the kidneys are offered, one’s heart/mind is offered to the LORD. And “liver” is in Hebrew *kabed*. Lamentation 2:11 says, “My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out to the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city” (ESV). Here “bile” is in Hebrew *kabed*, and the KJV translated it as just liver. Interestingly, bile is a bitter greenish-brown alkaline fluid that aids digestion and is secreted by the liver and stored in the gallbladder, signifying anger and irritability. And we remember in 1 Samuel 1:11 that in bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD.” Ezekiel 21:21 says, “For the king of Babylon will stop at the fork in the road, at the junction of the two roads, to seek an omen: He will cast lots with arrows, he will consult his idols, he will examine the liver.” The meaning is that by looking at the liver (of a sacrificed animal), the king of Babylon would decide which way he should go. So the liver can indicate the will. In short, what God wants from the offer/worshiper is the strength and the heart/mind and the soul/will, as he is to offer the fat, the kidneys, and the liver. Here, we are reminded of Deuteronomy 6:5, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” It is because this is how God loved us, giving us his Son, the best, all of his, not sparing his own Son (Rom 8:6). It is as a Hymn Song (The Old Rugged Cross, 233) says, “And I love that old cross, where the dearest and the best For a world of lost sinners was slain.” Certainly, Jesus’ life is the obedience of this command of God, and this command is for his people to obey. God wants from us such a whole-heartedly fellowship, not a superficial one.

It is interesting that fat and kidney and liver can also refer to our intellect and emotion and will, since our brain is full of fat and the kidney is related to heart/mind/thoughts/feelings (in other translations) and liver to the will. The point is that offering these substances to God means surrendering ourselves to God. It is the life of self-denial and full submission, which was the very life of our Lord Jesus. He said to each of his followers to deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Him (Lk 9:23). In this sacrifice of self-denial and whole submission, our fellowship with God can be beautifully established. It is notable that the fellowship offering is in most cases the sacrifice of the peace offering in Leviticus, when we refer to other translations. Again, this sacrifice is specific to the fellowship/peace offering. And verse 5 says, “Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.” This peace offering served as the appropriate corollary to the burnt offering of atonement and the grain offering of consecration and dedication. It is the fruit of redemptive reconciliation between a sinner and God.

Now in 7:11 it says, “These are the regulations for the fellowship offering a person may present to the LORD.” This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offering. Verse 12 says, “If he offers it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering…” And verse 16 says, “If, however, his offering is the result of a vow or a free will…” Here we see three kinds of the fellowship offering, the thank offering, votive offering, and the freewill offering. One can offer the fellowship offering as an expression of thankfulness. We can say that Christian life is the life of thankfulness and thanksgiving. First of all, we are thankful for his atonement/forgiveness for our sins, his redemption and salvation. The fellowship or peace offering is in Hebrew *shelem* from which we have *shalom*. When the Jews greet with *shalom*, they are considering four kinds of blessing, having peace with God, having peace with men not being harmed from other people, having peace through daily bread and material provision, and having peace through good health and healing of diseases. As his blessed people, we are to express our much thanks to God for his rich blessings in many areas of our lives on top of his saving grace: the gift of precious children and their growth, daily, monthly and yearly provision and our shelter, protection and sustenance of life each day, the community of God and the people who love and serve us and the people whom we can love and serve. The more we express our thanks to God, the richer our fellowship with God can be. All our voluntary material offerings have a lot of meanings. As we studied in 2 Corinthians, God loves a cheerful giver (9:7).

Verse 12 continues, “If he offers it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering he is to offer cakes of bread made without yeast and mixed with oil, wafters made without yeast and spread with oil, and cakes of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil.” This reminds us of the grain offering. And verse 13 says, “Along with his fellowship offering of thanksgiving he is to present an offering with cakes of bread made with yeast.” How mindful and gracious the LORD is when he allows them to eat bread with yeast! For this is a fellowship offering to be shared also among his fellow people. The unleavened bread is a hard bread with almost no pleasant taste as the bread of affliction (Dt 16:3). But the leavened bread is certainly a soft and very delicious one. Verse 14 says, “He is to bring one of each kind as an offering, a contribution to the LORD; it belongs to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the fellowships.” What an interesting expression, “the blood of the fellowship offering! It is good to remember that the blood of the burnt offering is for the atonement for sinners and, the blood of the fellowship/peace offering is for peace with God and with other others.

Then verse 15 says, “The meat of his fellowship offering of thanksgiving must be eaten on the day it is offered; he must leave none of it till morning.” Here we are to know that this fellowship offering is shared with other people. Deuteronomy 27:7 says, “Sacrifice fellowship offerings there, eating them and rejoicing in the presence of the LORD your God.” And it is written in Deuteronomy 12:11-12) “…there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offering and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD. And there rejoice before the LORD your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maid servants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own.” Here, “sacrifices” is the sacrifice of the fellowship offering. This is to be an extensive feast. And 1 Samuel 11:15 says, “So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.” It was the time of the inauguration of the king. And it is also written in 1 Kings 8:62-65, “Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the LORD. Solomon offered a sacrifice of the fellowship offerings to the LORD…So Solomon observed the festival at that time, and all Israel with him—a vast assembly…” It was the time of the dedication of the temple. We see that at the time of the fellowship offering, all the people of the community enjoyed eating together. All the meat of the fellowship offering had to be eaten on that day. The offerors were not to try to save the food for the next day. They had to be generous for the people of God. Thank God that whenever we eat together, our meal is rich, for people bring food abundantly with a willing and generous heart. Verse 16 says, “If, however, his offering is the result of vow or is a free will offering, the sacrifice shall be eaten on the day he offers it, but anything left over may be eaten on the next day.” Probably it was because more cattle, sheep or goats were sacrificed in such times. For Leviticus 22:23 says, “you may, however, present as a freewill offering an ox or a sheep that is deformed or stunted, but it will not be accepted in fulfillment of a vow.” Yet God said clearly in verse 17, “Any meat of the sacrifice left over till the third day must be burned up.” It is to serve others fully.

Here we see the picture of the kingdom of God. Isaiah 25:6 says, “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.” This is the picture of the messianic kingdom when Jesus comes again. And we read in Revelation 19:17, “And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God.” Even the birds of the air participate in the feast. Hebrews 12:28 says, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” It teaches further the attitude to join this feast of worship. And Romans 14:17 says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Certainly, in this fellowship eating is not the point but having fellowship in Christ Jesus who is our righteousness and peace and joy.

Now we cannot miss the banquet in Levi’s house. When Levi repented and accepted Jesus, he was full of joy and thanks. So he opened his house to Jesus and his disciples and invited many of his old friends to have chances to experience with Jesus. Levi, changed to Matthew, sacrificially prepared the table and all those invited were so happy and joyful, eating together with Jesus and his disciples and listening to him (Mk 2:15). We see that such a meal of eating together also has an evangelical purpose to share the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). However, there were some unhappy people, the teachers of the law who were Pharisees. They complained to Jesus about those who were eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17). We see who can attend the feast in the kingdom of God. It is the gathering of forgiven sinners, forgiven repentant sinners. They keep deep gratitude for the grace of forgiveness of sin through Christ Jesus and are humble enough to repent at each time. The self-righteous, proud and legalistic cannot enjoy this feast.

So, surprisingly, there are clear restrictions and warnings in regard to this joyful feast of the fellowship offering. They are to humbly obey the regulations. Particularly in verses 20 and 21 it says, “But if anyone who is unclean eats any meat of the fellowship belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off from his people. If anyone touches something unclean—whether human uncleanness or an unclean animal or any unclean, detestable thing—and then eats any of the meat of the fellowship offering belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off from the people.” They are cut off from the people of the community, for their relationship with God was broken on account of their ignoring the word of God. And verses 25-27 it says, “Anyone who eats the fat of an animal from which an offering by fire may be made to the LORD must be cut off from his people. And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people.” It is also written in 3:17, “This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood.” Fat maintains the strength, and blood is the very life. Both belong to God. God is the Lord of all life. We are to deeply recognize that my life belongs to him.

In verses 28-34, we see that the breast and the right thigh, which are really good parts of the offered animal, are given the Aaron the priest and his sons. Especially verse 34 says, From the fellowship offerings of the Israelites, I have taken the breast that is waved and the thigh that is heaved and have given them to Aaron the priest and his sons as their regular share from the Israelites.” The priests were set apart to serve the LORD fully with no inheritance of the land. God wanted the Israelites to be mindful of them as they honour God. Also, we are to know that when we live as a royal priesthood, he will provide everything we need.

Thank God for the precious words of the fellowship offering. Thank God for Jesus’ blood shed on the cross for our reconciliation to God and peace with God the Father. Thank God for granting us his best, the Son, so that we may also give our best, the most precious thing, to him for the true fellowship. May we get into this fellowship and live a life of feast in the LORD, generously serving others and sharing the message of reconciliation in view of the coming kingdom of God.