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Leviticus 22:1-7 I Peter 1:16 says, "... because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy,'" which is precisely the lesson contained within Leviticus 22:1-7. Our holy God is clearly saying, "Those who serve Me must also be holy." Holiness essentially means "set apart," but it also carries with it the sense of "different," which helps explain why a person or thing is set apart. Certain Peter or characteristics distinguish the set-apart one or thing, making it different from persons or things of the same kind. Holiness also has the sense of cleanliness or of being undefiled. God can just as easily be saying to the priests and their children, "I am a clean God, and I want those who serve Me to be clean." In this case, His transcendent purity of intent and character sets Him apart from others or things that people may consider to be god. He is therefore completely undefiled. The Leviticus passage mentions leprosy, a corpse, and semen. We must not forget that, when this was written, God was addressing a carnal people. Thus, the instruction is couched in physical terms, but we must look for spiritual meaning within the physical instruction. The Tabernacle, altar, priesthood, furniture, vessels, and all of the rites have spiritual significance, and Paul writes that they are "shadow(s) of good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1). Leprosy is a horrible, dreadful disease, but this is also a type of a spiritual disease. It is externally visible in its disfigurement of its victim's body. At times, there can be running sores. It probably does not parallel any one spiritual disease, but rather it symbolizes any number of sins that disfigure a person's character and/or attitude. Both a corpse and semen possibly represent carriers of disease. Something causes a person to die, and all too frequently, it is an invisible, internal disease, of which infections and cancers are examples. The widespread AIDS virus is a good example. It can be carried within a man's semen into a woman's body. The carrier may look healthy externally, but a deadly disease is present. Only the carrier may know of its existence within him. A corpse and semen represent sins that are not easily perceived. Withdrawal from participation in the fellowship requires the sinner to exercise discipline, as he may be the only one aware of his problem. Creeping things are also defilements from sins that are less obvious. Perhaps in this case, it might be problems with one's attitudes like resentment, bitterness, envy, jealousy, and lust. Regardless of what rendered a person unclean, he was not allowed to participate until he cleaned himself by washing in water, a type of the Holy Spirit. Even then, he was still considered unclean until evening of that same day. This process was a form of excommunication. The unclean person was symbolically excluded from communion with God and held unfit to eat of the holy food of the altar, symbolizing the Word of God, until he had cleaned up his act. Verse 7 distinctly says he was free to eat of the holy things only after the sun went down. Even given this permission, he was still somewhat removed from full exposure to the light of God's throne until the next day, when complete communication with God was restored. Taking steps to rid ourselves of uncleanness has awesome ramifications when we grasp how burdened we are with the potential for sin. The apostle Paul labels himself as a wretched man who greatly needed deliverance (Romans 7:24-25). Despite what we can do on our own—and God requires us to strive to do so—complete deliverance can only come through the work of Jesus Christ. It is essential that we know this, yet it is perhaps beyond our full understanding and appreciation that God is so merciful and full of grace to provide the sin offering that precedes us! If it were not for these elements—because we are so full of spiritual creeping things and spiritual leprosy—we would never be permitted to eat from the Lord's table. I and II Corinthians offers us great comfort by showing that, though one may be cut off from the body, he can return once he has cleaned himself through repentance. It shows that even though he is denied close communion with God because of some spiritual uncleanness, he still remains tied to God through the New Testament priesthood. Disfellowshipping is intended to be a temporary, corrective tool. I Corinthians 5:4-5 says, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The purpose of excommunication is to save the person from his uncleanness that is destroying his communion with God and others in the fellowship. Therefore, if he can still be saved, that person is not completely cut off from God. II Corinthians 6:14-17 adds more information to this subject. Paul asks four questions that provide comparisons that clearly urge us to avoid or depart from what is unclean so that we can be at peace and in communion with God. Fellowship with God and being allowed to eat spiritual food from His table are clearly conditioned upon our not falling into uncleanness but instead striving to maintain the purity provided by Christ's sacrifice. Our part in striving to maintain the purity is to follow Christ's example of thorough dedication in fulfilling the requirements of the burnt and meal offerings. Doing so in no way earns us the fellowship privileges expressed in the peace offering, but it does show God our understanding of faith, love, sacrifice, thanksgiving, and the links between total devotion to Him, Jesus Christ, our fellow man, and His wonderful purpose. God has invested a great deal to provide this for us. The least we can do is give back to Him full devotion in our life as a living sacrifice. John W. Ritenbaugh The Offerings of Leviticus (Part Five): The Peace Offering, Sacrifice, and Love. Page 2 Mark 15:6-15 Each of the four gospels gives an account of Barabbas' part in Jesus' trial (see Matthew 27:15-26; Luke 23:18-25; John 18:39-40). Matthew 27:16 says Barabbas was a notorious prisoner; John 18:40 calls him a robber. Many find the whole story little more than a curiosity, an interesting detail of the whole sordid affair. But is that all? Barabbas, a condemned murderer, robber, and insurgent. Guilty as charged. The Romans had gotten their man, and he deserved his punishment. Do we ever identify with Barabbas, the murderer? Perhaps we should. We have also been found guilty of murder. How? On the day of Pentecost after Jesus' death, Peter explains that we all have killed the Christ (Acts 2:36). We all, by requiring His blood be spilled to cleanse us of our sins, are really the ones who crucified Him. As surely as the Jewish mob agitated for His condemnation, as surely as the Roman lictor tore His flesh with his whip, as surely as the Roman soldiers pounded nails into His hands and feet, as surely as one ripped His side open with a spear, we caused the death of the innocent Son of Man, the very Son of God. Yes, the shed blood of the Innocent drips from our hands. By the standard Peter uses in Acts 2, we should be considered convicted murderers. This also means each of us should also have a date with the executioner—unless somehow, some way, someone can pass over our sins too. We know that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). He is our Passover (I Corinthians 5:7). Jesus took on Himself all the sins of all time and paid the penalty for all who will receive Him as Lord and Savior (I Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; 9:12; I John 2:2; etc.). So now, we can stand before God without condemnation, for "there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ; who... walk... according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). Even this sin—of murdering the Christ—is washed away forever. We are guilty as charged of murder and other sins. We have incurred the death penalty by law—unless somehow, someone will redeem us by paying the death penalty for us, pardoning our sins and canceling our appointment with the executioner. And just as happened to Barabbas, the One who does these things for us is Jesus Christ, our Savior. So what about Barabbas? Where does he come into this story? It is a moving reminder at Passover time each year that God leaves nothing to chance. Even the man who receives unmerited pardon is in the story for a reason: to remind us what we were and who we are now. Many look at the name "Barabbas" and think it is just a name. Perhaps they realize that it is an Aramaic word. But what does it mean? Bar means "son of" and abba means "father," with the connotation of closeness and intimacy similar to our "dad," "daddy," or "papa." Therefore, Barabbas is "the son of the father" or "the son of his dear father." That Passover day in AD 31, there was a guilty "son of the father"—Barabbas—and a totally innocent "Son of the Father"—Jesus Christ of Nazareth. There is possibly even more. Extant ancient texts say that Barabbas' full name was Jesus Barabbas. If that is correct—and it may be—then the crowd picked the wrong Jesus to be freed! Is that not typical of human nature? On our own, we too would choose the wrong savior and doom ourselves to bondage to sin and death rather than freedom from sin and eternal life (John 6:44; Romans 2:4). As individuals, we are whom Barabbas depicted, "the sons of our dear Father" who did not measure up. Each one of us is that child of God. When our Elder Brother Jesus Christ stepped up to be crucified for us, though He should have been the one released, having committed no wrong at all, God also released the rest of His children who would call upon the name of Jesus and expect His sacrifice in our stead. Just as surely as Barabbas walked out of that prison—a free man—Jesus gave Himself so each of us can walk free as well. That day was an agonizing, terrible day for Jesus, the Son of God. Were these not His own people? Some of these now screaming for His death were ones He had often seen, talked with, perhaps even dined with. These were people He knew, and some He knew well. Someday, when those of the house of Judah see the wounds in His hands, they will indignantly ask the Lamb, "Who did this to you?" (Zechariah 13:6). His prophetic reply is tinged with pain: "My wounds happened in the house of My friends." Jesus even calls Judas His "friend" (Matthew 26:50). Those "friends" include Peter, who denied Him; the Roman soldiers who executed Him; Pilate, who condemned Him; Caiphas the High Priest, the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the Jerusalem mob who schemed and clamored to crucify Him—and His friends include us, those who will form His Bride (John 15:13-15), whose sins made His gruesome, excruciating death necessary. Jesus is getting married soon. His Bride—the church of God—is born of His bones, flesh of His flesh, (Genesis 2:23), one body with Him (Ephesians 5:27-32). Jesus gave Himself for her—for us. The converted children of God are said to "be in Christ" and to be one with Him. We are His body, and He is the Head of that body of believers. If Jesus Barabbas was the murderer's name, perhaps Barabbas actually pictures those who are of Christ who are handed undeserved pardon. He may picture those of us who want to take on the name of Jesus but who have fallen short spiritually. We were guilty of sin and earned the death penalty. But the Eternal God saves. The Lord is salvation, which is what "Jesus" means. Thus, just as Barabbas was granted his life and freedom that day, the real Jesus, the real Son of the Father, steps up beside us and lovingly offers to take our place. We are Barabbas. We have truly become "the sons of the Father" because of what Jesus did in our behalf. We have been released from the penalty of eternal death because our Savior and affianced Husband, Jesus the Christ, died in our stead. All of this came about when the true Son of the Father took the place of Barabbas, who represents us all. As the despised Roman guards marched up to him, he was expecting the worse was about to begin. But instead, they broke off his heavy chains, dropping them to the stone floor with a clang that echoed through the corridors of the prison. Slowly, reality began to sink in: They were letting him go! Before long, Barabbas learned that the innocent Jesus of Nazareth, whom some considered a prophet, had given him a new lease on life—a fresh start, a new life. He was free! No crucifixion awaited this murderous, thieving thief after all! He undoubtedly could not believe his "luck." Because of the gracious act of Jesus, the true Son of His dear Father, the iron shackles have been broken from us, and we walk about as truly free men and women. His sacrifice and resurrection make it possible for God to give us of His Spirit, to bring us into His household, the Family of God. We are regenerated to a new life, and made part of the very Family in which Jesus is the Firstborn. The Father invites us to be His Son's Bride, whom Jesus is preparing for the Great Marriage Supper, giving of Himself totally for us, so that we can be totally free of sin as He is. When we pronounce our wedding vows to the King of kings, He will present us faultless, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Ephesians 5:25-27; Jude 24; II Peter 3:14). When we eat of the Passover bread, representing His body broken for us, and drink the wine, symbolizing His blood shed for the remission of our sins, let us remember who we are. We can be even more grateful for Jesus and the liberty and life He has given to each of us (Luke 4:18). Yes, we are Barabbas, sons of our dear Father, children of God. But we are Barabbas without the condemnation, for there is no more condemnation when Jesus passed over our sins and paid the ultimate penalty for us. 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False teachers in Galatia taught that one was justified by doing physical works of some kind. The majority of evidence indicates that the false teachers were teaching a blend of Judaism and Gnosticism. The philosophy of Gnosticism taught that everything physical was evil, and that people could attain a higher spiritual understanding through effort. It was the type of philosophy that its adherents thought could be used to enhance or improve anyone's religion. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, we read of this same philosophy having an influence on the church there. It was characterized by strict legalism, a "taste not, touch not" attitude, neglect of the body, worship of angels, and a false humility (Colossians 2:18-23). What, then, were the "days, months, seasons and years" that Paul criticizes the Galatians for observing? First, Paul nowhere in the entire letter mentions God's holy days. 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The word "elements" is the Greek stoicheion, which means any first thing or principle. "In bondage under the elements of the world" refers to the fact that the unconverted mind is subject to the influence of Satan and his demons, the rulers of this world and the authors of all idolatrous worship. Satan and his demons are the origin, the underlying cause, of the evil ways of this world, and all unconverted humans are under their sway. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). Paul is saying that because of the gracious act of Jesus, the true Son of His dear Father, the iron shackles have been broken from us, and we walk about as truly free men and women. His sacrifice and resurrection make it possible for God to give us of His Spirit, to bring us into His household, the Family of God. We are regenerated to a new life, and made part of the very Family in which Jesus is the Firstborn. 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these Israelites, they proclaim their religion in the name of God though. Jesus also says in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not the things that I say?" That is what they were doing in Exodus 32. What was their motivation? Does this have an end-time application to the church of God? The answer is in verse 1: Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Moses, the charismatic leader, the type of Jesus Christ, delayed his coming! That is alarming! What motivated Saul to make the sacrifice in I Samuel 13? Because Samuel's coming was delayed, Saul presumptuously took it into his own hands to do something he had not been commanded to do—to make the sacrifice. The problem was the delay he perceived. Do we understand why Christ says, "Do not say in your heart, 'The Lord delays His coming?'" He knew from the experiences from the Old Testament that, if we begin to think that Christ is delaying, then we will turn aside to idolatry because we will use it as a justification for adjusting ourselves to the spirit of the times we live in. This has alarming ramifications. What did the Israelites do here? Redefining the nature of God is merely the sin that led to adjusting their lifestyle, fall into idolatry. Will that be a problem for this generation? Are we going to think that Christ is delaying His coming? Sincerity is good, but truth is needed. It says in John 4:24 that God is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. We need to examine ourselves to see whether we are making adjustments in our way of life to be in harmony with the spirit of the age. Do we keep Sabbath just like the world keeps Sunday? If we do, we have adjusted already. Are we careful in tithe? Are we concerned, God will not come with prosperity? If so, we are already beginning to make adjustments. Who is the idol? We are. We change the image of God in our way of life, saying, "He won't understand." He does understand, but He wants us to trust Him. He knows we are under pressure, but He knows we need to learn to do without, to suffer, to wait. Do we believe that? John W. Ritenbaugh Passover and I Corinthians 10:1 Page 13 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 is written to the Corinthians, Paul gives a simple framework for understanding spirit in general, as well as the Holy Spirit. Verse 11 teaches that each person has a spirit: "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" This echoes Job 32:8: "Therefore spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding." In this usage, the word "spirit" is synonymous with "heart" or "mind." This is the intelligent, non-physical part of a person that allows him to think, reason, and comprehend. Verse 11 teaches that a person's spirit is the source and overseer of his thoughts. This spirit in man is not another being within the person but simply the person's center of reason. Next, verse 12 reveals that the world has a spirit. Like the spirit in man, this spirit is also a separate being. But the usage of "spirit" is slightly different. Rather than being the center of reason, the spirit of the world is the world's attitude, its inclination, tendency and atmosphere, or frame of mind. The spirit of the world is the spirit of the culture, which can manifest in many ways, but will also be present in the spirit of the Old Testament. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:2-3, saying that we "walked in the flesh, according to the course of this world, the course, of this world is the evil and unnatural, mortal, and fleshly way of life." The spirit of the world influences us to do what is pleasing to the flesh. The spirit of the world is the spirit along a natural, carnal, and evil path to keep us in opposition to the Cross. While the spirit cannot be seen, we can see the effects of spirit. It is not a coincidence that the word for "spirit," "pneuma," can also be translated as "wind" or "breath"—just as Job 32:8, quoted above, parallels the spirit in man to "the breath of the Almighty." We can see the moving air molecules in wind, but we can observe leaves and branches being moved and know that wind is present. In the dry areas of the West, tumbleweeds roll along and dust-devils form, spin, and disintegrate, revealing that the wind is at work. In the same way, we cannot see spirit, but we can see the actions and attitudes of mankind, and thus find evidence of the spirit that is working. The spirit of the world influences and stirs up the spirit in man, inducing the individual to think and feel in a certain way, ultimately, to act. Returning to I Corinthians 2:12, Paul mentions a spirit that we have received. This is in addition to the spirit in man, with which we were born, and in opposition to the spirit of the world. This additional spirit is from, and of, God. We can conclude that, like mankind, God also has a spirit. God has a mind, one of unfathomable depth, capability, and intelligence. But more than simply an overwhelming intellect, God's Spirit includes: His attitude, principles, thoughts, feelings, temperament, character, disposition, and will. To put it simply, God's Spirit is the essence of His incredible mind, and it is the new motivating principle that God's children receive. I Corinthians 2:16 shows that God's Spirit is not another supernatural being. It begins with a quotation of Isaiah 40:13—"who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?"), but then Paul follows up with, "But we have the mind of Christ." This is Paul's explanation of the spirit we have received. It is a principle, a disposition, a motivating influence that comes from God Himself. "Spirit," "heart," and "mind," while not identical, are used interchangeably. It is the mind of Christ that we have received that allows us to know the things of God, to know what God has prepared for us, and to know the things that have been given to us. Thus, Paul equates the Spirit of God to the mind of Christ. The essence of His mind enhances our minds, giving us spiritual understanding. The Father and the Son are one, not in the sense of being the same Person, but in the sense of being perfectly united in will, thought, and intent. They are of the same mind, the same heart—the same spirit. It is that Spirit that we receive when we are baptized and have hands laid on us. As a result, we can begin to understand the things of God, which the world cannot understand. Without God's intervention, mankind is only influenced by the spirit of the world, which has its source in "the prince of the power of the air." Because God is holy, His Spirit is also holy. God has many facets and qualities, yet the four living creatures in Revelation 4:8 praise Him day and night for being "holy, holy, holy." The fact that they say "holy" three times does not mean that He is three persons. It means His holiness is superlative—it is the very highest possible. Our holy God's Spirit, the essence of His perfect mind, is also holy. That holiness is not merely an attribute, but it is also what God's Spirit will incline His people toward: holiness in conduct, in attitude, in speech, in every facet of living. God says, "Be holy, for I am holy," and His Spirit will move us toward His holiness, if we cooperate. David C. Grabbe What Is the Holy Spirit? Page 14 Leviticus 22:1-7 1 Peter 1:16 says, "... because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy,'" which is precisely the lesson contained within Leviticus 22:1-7. Our holy God is clearly saying, "Those who serve Me must also be holy." Holy essentially means "set apart," but it also carries with it the sense of "different," which helps explain why a person or thing is set apart. Certain factors of intent and character distinguish the set-apart one or thing, making it different from persons or things of the same kind. Holy also has the sense of cleanliness or of being undefiled. God can just as easily be saying to the priests and their children, "I am a clean God, and I want those who serve Me to be clean." In this case, His transcendent purity of intent and character sets Him apart from others or things that people may consider to be god. He is therefore completely undefiled. The Leviticus passage mentions leprosy, a corpse, and semen. We must not forget that, when this was written, God was addressing a carnal people. Thus, the instruction is couched in physical terms, but we must look for spiritual meaning within the physical instruction. The Tabernacle, altar, priesthood, furniture, vessels, and all of the rites have spiritual significance, and Paul writes that they are "shadow[s] of good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1). Leprosy is a horrible, dreadful disease, thus it is a type of a spiritual disease. It is externally visible in its disfigurement of its victim's body. At times, there can be running sores. It probably does not parallel any one spiritual disease, but rather it symbolizes any number of sins that disfigure a person's character and/or attitude. Both a corpse and semen possibly represent carriers of disease. Something causes a person to die, and all too frequently, it is an invisible, internal disease, of which infections and cancers are examples. The widespread AIDS virus is a good example. It can be carried within a man's semen into a woman's body. The carrier may look healthy externally, but a deadly disease is present. Only the carrier may know of its existence within him. A corpse and semen represent sins that are not easily perceived. Withdrawal from participation in the fellowship requires the sinner to exercise discipline, as he may be the only one aware of his problem. Creeping things are also defilements from sins that are less obvious. Perhaps in this case, it might be problems with one's attitudes like resentment, bitterness, envy, jealousy, and lust. Regardless of what rendered a person unclean, he was not allowed to participate until he cleansed himself by washing in water, a type of the Holy Spirit. Even then, he was still considered unclean until evening of that same day. This process was a form of excommunication. The unclean person was symbolically excluded from communion with God and held unfit to eat the holy food of the altar, symbolizing the Word of God, until he had cleaned up his act. Verse 7 distinctly says he was free to eat of the holy things only after the sun went down. Even given this permission, he was still eating in the dark! Though accepted back into fellowship, he was still somewhat removed from full exposure to the light of God's throne until the next day, when complete communication with God was restored. Taking steps to rid ourselves of uncleanness has awesome ramifications when we grasp how burdened we are with the potential for sin. The apostle Paul labels himself as a wretched man who greatly needed deliverance (Romans 7:24-25). Despite what we can do on our own—and God requires us to strive to do—complete deliverance can only come through the work of Jesus Christ. It is essential that we know this, yet it is perhaps beyond our full understanding and appreciation that God is so merciful and full of grace to provide the sin offering that preceases us! If we were not for these elements—because we are so full of spiritual creeping things and spiritual leprosy—we would never be permitted to eat from the Lord's table. I and II Corinthians offers us great comfort by showing that, though one may be cut off from the body, he can return once he has cleaned himself through repentance. It shows that even though he is denied close communion with God because of some spiritual uncleanness, he still remains tied to God through the New Testament priesthood. Disfellowship is intended to be a temporary, corrective tool. I Corinthians 5:4-5 says, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The purpose of excommunication is to save the person from his uncleanness that is destroying his communion with God and others in the fellowship. Therefore, if we can still be saved, that person is not completely cut off from God. II Corinthians 6:14-17 adds more information to this subject. Paul asks four questions that provide comparisons that clearly urge us to avoid or depart from what is unclear so that we can be at peace and in communion with God. Fellowship with God and being allowed to eat spiritual food from His table are clearly conditioned upon our not falling into uncleanness but instead striving to maintain the purity provided by Christ's sacrifice. Our part in striving to maintain the purity is to follow Christ's example of thorough dedication in fulfilling the requirements of the burnt and meal offerings. Doing so in no way earns us the fellowship privileges expressed in the peace offering, but it does show God our understanding of faith, love, sacrifice, thanksgiving, and the links between total devotion to Him, Jesus Christ, our fellow man, and His wonderful purpose. God has invested a great deal to provide this for us. The least we can do is give back to Him full devotion in our life as a living sacrifice. John W. Ritenbaugh The Offerings of Leviticus (Part Five): The Peace Offering, Sacrifice, and Love Page 15 Galatians 4:9-10 The common, traditional explanation of Galatians 4:9-10 is that Paul is reprimanding the Galatians for returning to Old Testament observances that were a form of "bondage." Insisting that Paul taught that the Old Testament law was "done away" (Colossians 2:14), they conclude that Christians should not keep the days that God had commanded Israel to keep. In verse 10, Paul mentions observances of "days and months and seasons and years." Some contend that these observances refer to God's Sabbath and holy days commanded in the Old Testament. But this interpretation overlooks many foundational points. Galatia was not a city but a province in Asia Minor. The church membership was undoubtedly composed mainly of Gentiles, and the males were physically uncircumcised (Galatians 5:2; 6:12-13). In looking at Paul's initial dealings with these people, we find that they had a history of worshipping pagan deities. In Lystra, a city in Galatia, God healed a crippled man through Paul (Acts 14:8-18). The people of the area were so astonished at this miracle that they supposed Barnabas and Paul, whom they called Zeus and Hermes (verse 12), to be pagan gods! They wanted to sacrifice to them, and would have, if the apostles had not stopped them (verses 13-18). This shows that the people in Galatia were generally superstitious and worshipped pagan deities. The major theme of the Galatian epistle is to put them "back on the track" because someone had been teaching "a different gospel," a perversion of the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-7). The Galatians had derailed on their understanding of how sinners are justified. False teachers in Galatia taught that everything physical was evil, and that people could attain a higher spiritual understanding through effort. It was the type of philosophy that its adherents thought could be used to enhance or improve anyone's religion. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, we read of this same philosophy having an influence on the church there. It was characterized by strict legalism, a "taste not, touch not" attitude, neglect of the body, worship of angels, and a false humility (Colossians 2:18-23). What, then, were the "days, months, seasons and years" that Paul criticizes? First, Paul nowhere in the entire letter mentions God's holy days. Second, the apostle would never refer to holy days that God instituted as "weak and beggarly elements." He honored and revered God's law (Romans 7:12, 14, 16). Besides, he taught the Corinthian to observe Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (I Corinthians 5:7-8), and he kept the Sabbath and holy days himself (Acts 16:13; 18:21; 20:6; I Corinthians 16:8). Paul draws an analogy in which he likens the Jews to a child who wanted to continue and glorify the Gentiles who had received the gospel. Prior to the coming of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles were under the "bondage under the elements of the world" (verse 3). The word "elements" is the Greek stoicheion, which means any first thing or principle. In "bondage under the elements of the world" refers to the fact that the unconverted man is subject to the influence of Satan and his demons through the world and the earthly first things or principles. Prior to the coming of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles were under the "bondage under the elements of the world" (verse 3). The word "elements" is the Greek stoicheion, which means any first thing or principle. In "bondage under the elements of the world" refers to the fact that the unconverted man is subject to the influence of Satan and his demons through the world and the earthly first things or principles. Prior to the coming of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles were under the "bondage under the elements of the world" (verse 3). The word "elements" is the Greek stoicheion, which means any first thing or principle. 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what it means to be free. Being free does not mean the same thing to every person because the same things are not equally important to everybody. Some people have placed their spin on freedom, because of their circumstances, as a need for more food. Other people want to be free to exercise their sexual passions with a great deal more liberty. Everybody puts a little bit different twist on what he or she would like to be free to do. Why? Peter writes, . . . knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct [conduct going nowhere] received by tradition from your fathers. . . . (I Peter 1:18) Tradition is that cultural way, method, or outlook that is imposed on us from birth. The influences of our culture are layered on us like an onion. What layers of culture and therefore, traditions, heaped on us? The initial layer is impressed on us by the home, the family—or the lack thereof. It begins to set our minds about what is important in life. Then there is a slightly larger segment—the neighborhood. At first, the neighborhood does not have a great deal of influence, but once we begin to expand our lives outside of the home, mother's and dad's influence slowly begin to wane. Our peers in our neighborhood begin to impress upon us a little bit broader cultural layer because we have escaped, as it were, from the home and have now gone out into the neighborhood. We keep layering it out: The city has an impact on us, the state, the region, and then the nation. Peter said that we have been redeemed from tradition. In the United States, this thing about tradition has become crazy. One of the buzzwords of our time is multiculturalism. We have people in the United States who want to make sure that English is not the official language of the nation because they want to hang on to another culture. It used to be that, when people immigrated to our nation, they strove to conform to the American culture and tradition. They wanted to become full-fledged Americans. So what did they have to do in order to do that? They had to submit to the customs and traditions of their new homeland. But today there is a powerful drive to get people to do just the opposite, to hold on to the customs and traditions of their former homelands. This process is helping to tear the nation apart! We are slowly being driven toward an absolute confusion of ideas because these cultures cannot agree. We have an environment ready-made for conflict—unless someone submits. The world is the way it is because Adam and Eve took of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which indicates knowledge from many sources. This was sort of a preview of multiculturalism—knowledge from many sources without the spiritual guidance of God. We have to get God into the picture. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. (II Thessalonians 2:15) God has His traditions too! On the one hand, we have the traditions that God is teaching us through His Word, through His ministers. He has traditions to which He wants His Family to conform. But we have brought traditions with us out of the world. It sets the stage for conflict! The traditions of God and the traditions that we have from the world will not mesh! When we add to this our desire to be free, it makes an interesting mess! But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. (II Thessalonians 3:6) The major difference is that His traditions are right and true, and they work! However, because conversion is a process, and because we do not instantly and magically know all of God's traditions, we all bring our former traditions into the church with us. Thus, the church is set up for conflict, which is a major reason why Paul wrote the book of Ephesians. It shows that for there to be unity, both Israelite and Gentile have to submit to Christ because both of their cultures and traditions are wrong! Again, we have been mis-educated by the traditions of family, society, region, state, and nation. We carry those characteristics with us. Not every one of them is wrong, but they do set us up for conflict with God and with each other. Only the traditions of God are completely right and true and will produce the right things. When there is conflict between the traditions that we have brought from the church and God's traditions, we have to submit to God because we are not free to do as we please. If we do as we please because we put our own particular spin on what we think liberty is, it will bring us into conflict with God—and that is not nice! It is detrimental to one's spiritual health and one's relationship with God! The second reason we have trouble is because our attitudes are perverted. And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh [notice what drives human beings: This wicked spirit is motivating the lusts of our flesh], fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Ephesians 2:1-3) There is a spirit characterized by desire—lust—to have it our way. Mis-education combined with negative attitudes equals conflict. Human nature is a package of attitudes dominated by the desire to gratify the self. That is why there is so much conflict (see James 4:1-3). Our desires—whether it is husband and wife in marriage, or in business, or in politics among nations—keep crashing into one another. Conflict will never end until everyone is keeping the traditions of God. That is why we are in the process of conversion. It is our responsibility to convert over to God's traditions so that we stop crashing into one another. We have to recognize that we are still influenced and that we pick up on his broadcasts. It makes submitting so difficult. The adversary is still working and bringing about conflict. Anywhere Satan goes, conflict erupts. He is a master at producing it. Liberty without guidelines (like laws, principles, doctrines, policies, or even the example of another person) to which one submits (meaning we as individuals submit through self-control or self-governance) will turn into chaos because of the desire for the power to control. The desire to control is what we would call freedom—liberty. That is why there are so many horrible divorces and re-marriages. Submission, whether accepted willingly or grudgingly, is a necessity. It is better to accept it and do it grudgingly than not to do it at all! We have to understand, then, that there is authority. It may be God, another human being, a law, a precedent, etc., but there will be an authority. It is an unavoidable fact of life. We face it all the time. Everybody lives under authority, and everybody must submit, even if it is only to the laws of nature—there is hardly a person who will not submit to the law of gravity while standing on the edge of a thousand-foot drop. It is that simple. Thus, because we step away from the cliff and not over it, we have submitted to a law. Why? Because we want to preserve our liberty, our desire to live. We know if we break that law—if we do not submit to it—it will break us to bits at the bottom of the cliff. Notice that this subject has a broad application. Submission does not involve only relationships with God or relationships with other people. Submission occurs in almost every area of life, even in submitting to things we would call common sense or the laws of nature. Anybody who has the mind of God will be looking for every opportunity to submit because that is, paradoxically, where true freedom lies. Recall John 8:32, where Jesus says, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Is not His implication that one shall be free only if he submits to the truth? Knowing the truth is not enough; liberty comes to those who submit to the truth. If one is standing on the edge of a thousand-foot drop, common sense and the truth of God say that one should obey the law of gravity—unless one desires to give up his freedom to live. True liberty consists of submitting to truth. It is the liberty God wants us to have. John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023) Submitting (Part 1) Page 25 Genesis 1:26-27 The word "image" is translated from the Hebrew *tselem*, and it means "shape, resemblance, figure, shadow." There is nothing abstract in it. This same word appears in Genesis 5:3: "Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." Adam lived 130 years and begot a son in his likeness, after his shape, after his figure, after his shadow. Absolutely no one argues anywhere about the meaning of "image" here. There is nothing abstract. Even as the animals reproduced after their kind, so did Adam and Eve reproduce after their kind. What they reproduced was in the form and shape of Adam and Eve. It was in their image. Only when we apply this to God do people begin to question, all on the assumption that God really does not have any shape. They claim that a human-like appearance is something that He uses only when convenient. However, that is not what the Bible testifies. If we desire to be accurate with the Scriptures, we must be consistent with the way the Bible's writers used these words. The same word is used of Adam and Eve as is used of God. God uses this word in Exodus 20:4—right in the second commandment: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image [*tselem*]" This is the same word as in Genesis 1:26. Does anybody contend that these carved images do not look like eagles, dragons, snakes, or men or women? No, the image, the idol, looks like, resembles, the shape, the form, of what it is being copied from. We also find this word in Leviticus 26:1; Psalm 106:19; and Isaiah 40:18-20; 44:9-17. The word *tselem* appears seventeen times in the Old Testament, and even the liberal Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, which goes to great lengths to avoid saying it, admits that concrete form and physical resemblance must be considered for Genesis 1:26-27: "Perhaps we may conclude that, while much of the thought that there is an external resemblance between God and man may be present, Ezekiel, who was a priest, has it" (vol. II, p. 684). Scripture cannot be broken; it does not contradict itself. The editors of the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible have to admit that *tselem* carries the meaning of concrete form and physical resemblance. Man looks like God. Continuing the quote: "However cautiously he states it, P [P stands for 'Priestly,' one of the four groups whom critical scholars believe edited the Bible] seems to have reached a measure of abstraction." The editors of the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible are sneaky. "Well, maybe there is a concrete resemblance, and we know that Ezekiel has it, yet the fellow who wrote Genesis 1, perhaps he reached a measure of abstraction." How hard they find it to give up their assumption! The same internal consistency happens with the word "likeness," which translates the Hebrew word *demooth*, meaning, "model, shape, fasten, similitude, and bodily resemblance." Notice Genesis 5:1, 3: This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness [*demooth*] of God. . . . And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness [*demooth*], after his image, and named him Seth. If *demooth* is used for God's creation of man in His image in Genesis 1:26, and then it appears in Genesis 5:1, 3, do we not have to apply the same disconcertment about what God intends? *Demooth* also appears in Isaiah 40:18; Ezekiel 1:5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 28; 10:1, 22. When we study the whole subject, we begin to understand why Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible had to conclude that Ezekiel showed man in physical resemblance to God. John W. Ritenbaugh Image and Likeness of God (Part One) Page 26 Genesis 2:1-3 Because the Sabbath is from creation—and the Creator Himself set the pattern for man by resting on it—it has universal validity. It is not from one of the patriarchs or Moses or from the Jews because none of these existed when it was created. The Bible shows three times in two verses that God very clearly inspired the seventh day, not a seventh day. God could have ended His creative work at the end of the sixth day because it seemed at that point as though He had provided everything man needed for life. But He did not complete it then because all man needed was not yet created! The Sabbath is, in fact, THE VERY CROWN of the creation week. It is vital to man's well-being. So God created a period of rest and holy time—a very specific period, as the context shows. God draws our attention to four things He did on that first Sabbath. He (1) ended His work, (2) rested, (3) blessed the seventh day, and (4) sanctified it. He created something just as surely as He created physical things on the other six days. He is instructing us that, on the Sabbath, creation continued but in a different form, one not outwardly visible. To those with understanding, the Sabbath symbolizes that God is still creating. Jesus confirms this in John 5:17, when a dispute arises over how to keep the Sabbath. He replies, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." The Sabbath is an integral part of the process of creation. God finished the physical part at the end of the sixth day. The spiritual aspect began with the creation of the Sabbath and continues to this day. Through the sequence of events on the first six days, God created an environment for man and life. But God shows through the creation of the Sabbath that the life-producing process is not complete with just the physical environment. The Sabbath provides an important part in producing spiritual life—life with a dimension the physical cannot supply. The Sabbath is not an afterthought of a tremendous creation, but a deliberate memorializing of the most enduring thing man knows: time. Time plays a key role in God's spiritual creation. It is not if God says, "Look at what I have made and consider that I am not yet finished creating. I am reproducing Myself, and you can be a part of My spiritual creation." Of all the offerings, the sin and trespass offerings are the best known and understood because of their clear association with Christ's crucifixion for the sins of the world. At the other end of the spectrum, the peace offering is the least understood because its symbolism, while easy to grasp, is perhaps the most difficult to experience in actual practice. It is introduced in Leviticus 3:1-5: When his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers it of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the Lord. And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it at the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons, the priests shall sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. Then he shall offer from the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made by fire to the Lord. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove; and Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice, which is on the wood, as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord. Biblical commentators have given this offering a variety of titles, "Peace," "fellowship," "praise," and "thanksgiving" are the most common. However, the Keil-Delitzsch Commentary states that the most correct is "saving offering" (vol. 1, p. 298). Each title shows a somewhat different aspect of the teaching contained in it. Verse 5 informs us that this too is a sweet-savor offering, indicating that no sin is involved in it, and thus it is most satisfying to God. The word "satisfying" is important to understanding this offering. Verse 5 also shows us an aspect of the ritual that teaches us about this offering's purpose. It is burnt upon, that is, on top of, the burnt sacrifice, which in turn had the meal offering on top of it. They were not necessarily layered like a sandwich and then all burned at the same time. However, the daily burnt offering was always made first, and it was followed by the meal offering and the peace offering on the same fire (Keil-Delitzsch, vol. 1, p. 300). The peace offering, then, had to be offered after the other two were already burning. How long after is lost to history, but it could not have been a long time if the same fire was used. Peaceful Communion Leviticus 7:11-18, 29-32 provides more information regarding the specific distribution of the various parts of this animal sacrifice: This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall offer to the Lord: If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer, with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of finely blended flour mixed with oil. Besides the cakes, as his offering he shall offer leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offering. And from it he shall offer one cake from each offering as a heave offering to the Lord. It shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offering. The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day it is offered. He shall not leave any of it until morning. But if the sacrifice of this offering is a vow or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offers his sacrifice; but on the next day the remainder of it also may be eaten; the remainder of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day must be burned with fire. And if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted, nor shall it be imputed to him; whoever offers it shall be an abomination, and the person who eats of it shall bear guilt. . . . He who offers the sacrifice of his peace offering to the Lord shall bring his offering to the Lord from the sacrifice of his peace offering. His own hands shall bring the offerings made by fire to the Lord. The fat with the breast he shall bring, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the Lord. And the priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons'. Also the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a heave offering from the sacrifices of your peace offerings. We need to understand the order followed here: The offerer brought his offering to the altar, laid his hand on it, and slew it. The priest sprinkled the blood upon the altar and around it. The animal was then cut up, and God's portion—almost entirely fat, besides the two kidneys—was placed on top of the already burning burnt and meal offerings. Then the priest received the breast and right shoulder for himself and his children, and the offerer received the remainder of the animal to eat. However, it had to be eaten within one day if it was a thank offering or within two days if it was a vow or voluntary offering. If any remained on the third day, it had to be burned. In this process, the major teaching of the peace offering is revealed. Recall that the burning on the altar of the sweet-savor offerings pictures God consuming a meal and being satisfied. Likewise, the priest receiving his portion shows him being satisfied, and the offerer with his portion is also satisfied. "Accepted," "convinced," "supplied," "persuaded," "pleased," and "assured" all capture the intent of the symbolism. In addition, since all parties—God, priest, and man—share the same meal and satisfaction, it shows all in peaceful communion or fellowship. Because it was placed in sequence on top of the other two offerings, the peace offering is directly connected to them, and thus it depicts the effect of perfect devotion to God and man: peaceful satisfaction and fellowship, the fruit of devotedly keeping the two great commandments of the law. In this sacrifice Christ symbolically plays all three parts: He is the offering, sacrificing His life in service; He is the priest, serving mankind at the altar as Mediator; and He is the offerer, bringing His sacrifice to the altar. The altar, the place of meeting for all three, represents sacrificial services and devotion to God that give Him satisfaction and result in our acceptance. The peace offering shows man, as Christ, accepted, fed, strengthened, and satisfied by sacrifice, teaching that sacrifice is indeed the essence, the heart and core, the essential element, of love whether to God or man. More specifically, it shows us that sacrifice plays a major role in acceptance before God, spiritual feeding and therefore spiritual strength, and spiritual satisfaction. Devoted people sacrifice for those they love. Thus, sacrifice indicates devotion to God (burnt offering) and devotion in service to man (meal offering). A Sense of Satisfaction Everyone desires to feel a sense of satisfaction, that all is well. This is largely what we all strive for in life. But how are we trying to achieve it? If we grasp the general instruction contained within the sacrifices, we ought to be able to understand how spiritually damaging self-centeredness and striving for the wrong goals in life are. Self-centeredness produces the opposite fruit of self-sacrifice. Self-centeredness does not feed and strengthen a sense of satisfaction and contentment. It destroys through spiritual malnutrition, producing a hunger or craving for more of what never satisfies. John simply and practically lays down this principle in I John 3:16-24: By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us. In verse 16, John teaches that we can know love by observing the way Jesus lived His life. He sacrificed His life for us by laying it down each day, as well as in death, setting us an example to follow in our relations with the brethren. In verse 17, he provides a practical illustration of a way we can lay down our life in love. Then, in verse 18, he encourages us not merely to agree with truth but to take action to meet a brother's need. Verse 19 begins to show the effect of devoted sacrifice to this way of life. The persuasive power of knowing we are doing the right things inspires assurance, confidence, and satisfaction; we feel a positive sense that we are right with God. He then explains that, when these are not produced—but instead we feel guilt and condemnation because we know we are not doing well, and our concern for not being perfect overwhelms us—we need to go to God for forgiveness because He will forgive. Verse 21 is a subtle encouragement to repeat, to turn from our self-centeredness so we can be at peace with God and within ourselves. Verse 22 discloses the positive effect of laying down our lives in sacrifice for our brethren by devotedly keeping the commandments: answered prayers. Living by faith and displaying it through a life of sacrificial love is the theme of verse 23, and finally, in verse 24, he reveals another positive effect: to know absolutely that He lives in us and we in Him. Our lives revolve around faith in this knowledge. The question at this point is still, "How are we trying to find satisfaction in life?" We could reword it, "How are we trying to find love, joy, and peace?" The Parable of the Prodigal Son touches on this issue: And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:13-17) Like the young man, we yearn for a feeling of well-being, peace, security, fun, and happiness. Also like him, we pursue after them, attempting to produce them in virtually every way. But the Father's way. We, like him, experience the same empty, hollow, something-is-missing feelings. Some may remember a popular song of a few decades ago sung by Peggy Lee titled "Is That All There Is?" The lyrics dealt with this very subject. The singer recounts having tried so many supposedly exciting and fulfilling things in life yet having found no lasting satisfaction in any of them. Following each experience, she concludes by asking the question, "Is that all there is?" The song clearly expresses that such a life is not truly fulfilling. What is missing from such a life is the true purpose of life, combined with the effort of fulfilling it by living the required way. These three offerings in Leviticus 1-3 broadly define God's way of life: doing all things within the context of His purpose in love. As we have seen, I John 5:3 defines love as keeping the commandments, and the essence of love is sacrificial giving. Though without the Spirit of God, some people (psychologists, for instance) have figured out much of this. The part they have not determined through observing humanity is the true purpose of life because God has not revealed it to them. They have, however, found that the essence of love is sacrifice and that doing the right things produces a sense of well-being. Give of Your Best How does God react to those who should know better but live before Him a poor-quality life? God's reaction—He is not pleased: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name? You offer defiled food on My altar. But you say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the Lord is contemptible.' And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" says the Lord of hosts. Here God indicates the people of Malachi's day for offering inferior, sometimes even defiled animals on His altar! The spiritual parallel concerns the offering of our lives in service to Him and fellowman. Are we, out of love for God and His people, giving the best we have to offer in life's circumstances? Solomon admonishes in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going." A Protestant hymn, "Give of Your Best to the Master," expresses this requirement well. Though God accepts us because of Jesus Christ, He expects us to give the very best we can in return. Luke 22:15-16 specifically concerns Jesus' Passover offering, but we need to consider its effects in light of the peace offering rather than the sin offering: "Then He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' First, God is satisfied because man is in communion with Him through Christ, the offering. Second, man is satisfied because he knows he is accepted by God and in fellowship with Him. Third, the priest is satisfied because, as the common friend of formerly estranged parties, He is happy to see them in fellowship. No wonder Christ desired this particular Passover! It produced the very purpose for which He came. The medium that brings this all about is sacrifice. It is not just Christ's sacrifice on the stake, for it just culminated a whole series of sacrifices that began in heaven when He sacrificed His glory as God, became a man, and subjected Himself to the Father's will perfectly. Christ's stated desire here is looking forward to God and mankind being in fellowship with each other in His Kingdom—the ultimate effect of giving the best of ourselves to God following Jesus' example. Recall the thought expressed in I John 3:20: "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." This is vitally important to us because we of all people are subject to intense feelings of self-condemnation and guilt from knowing that we are not living up to God's standard. We truly care about what God thinks of us because we know more than most about Him. Our faith is not to be blind and unthinking but based on truth. Our application of faith in light of this verse necessitates a fascinating balance between two extremes that arise from our more precise knowledge of God's way. Both extremes are wrong. The first extreme, already noted, is that we live life in constant guilt and fear that God's hammer will fall and smash us to smithereens at any moment due to our imperfections. The second is a laissez-faire, God-is-very-merciful-and-tolerant, He-understands-my-weaknesses attitude. In this extreme, sins are accepted as part of the normal course of life, and no determined effort is made to overcome them. Some have given in to a particular sin, exclaiming, "God understands my needs." God also understands rebellion. But whatever happened to Jesus' strong admonition, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out!" or "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off!" (Matthew 5:29-30)? Certainly, He does not mean this literally, but it illustrates the serious determination, vigor, and strength we are to employ in overcoming sin. Those who minimize sin come close to trampling the Son of God underfoot and putting His sacrifice to an open shame (see Hebrews 6:6; 10:29). How good is the sacrifice of such a person's life? He is guilty of practicing sin. John writes, "Whoever is born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (I John 3:9). Later, in Revelation 22:15, he adds, "But outside [the New Jerusalem] are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." Such people will not be in God's Kingdom. Their consciences have adjusted in a similar way to the situation in Malachi 1. Sin, a defiled life, is acceptable, and their attitude seems to be that God will just have to be satisfied with children who will not strive to overcome. This is dangerous business indeed because God says only those who overcome will inherit all things (Revelation 21:7). Is God satisfied with such a situation? Does He not desire a better offering from His children for their welfare and His glory? If He is not content, the fellowship is either already broken or is breaking down. Acceptable to God our concern, however, is for those who are striving to overcome but still failing from time to time—those who know they are not living up to the standard and struggle with a guilty conscience and feel their fellowship with God is cut off because of occasional sin. The majority of us probably fall into this category. When we commit the occasional sin, we are no longer acceptable to God? Is our fellowship truly cut off? While it is true that sin separates us from Him, do we remain unsatisfied because we feel there is no communion? Once again, God's grace rescues us from what would otherwise be an impossible situation. Amidst the first-century church's rather passionate discussions over the applicability of certain portions of the law, Peter says in Acts 15:10-11: "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." Peter is acknowledging this very situation, except his reference is to the Old Covenant. He recognizes that, if we try to be as holy as God is holy in this life through obedience alone, we put ourselves into an impossible situation. It is this fact, in part, that Israel's experiences under the Old Covenant were designed to reveal. Undoubtedly, most Pharisees were sincere in their misguided devotion to God. Paul writes in Romans 10:2 that Israel has "a zeal for God but not according to knowledge," that is, true knowledge. In their efforts to be pure, they added law upon law to try to keep from sinning—and perhaps even add a measure of absolution—but they made matters only more difficult with each new law. The answer to this confounding situation lies in a change of our natures arising from repentance, receipt of God's Holy Spirit, and—perhaps above all—access to God through Jesus Christ. Through these come fellowship and experience with them throughout the remainder of life and access to God's merciful grace when we fall short. There can be no doubt we are saved by grace through faith. Our depression and extreme self-condemnation reveals a lack of faith in God's willingness to forgive upon repentance. Though works are required of us, we cannot earn our way into the Kingdom through them because they will forever fall short in providing payment for sin. Paul confirms, however, that love requires works: "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:2). Notice that Paul says Christ has given Himself to us for a sin offering but as one not involving sin: He was a burnt, meal, and peace offering. He gave Himself for us in the manner in which He lived His life. Even as Christ's sin offering is for us, and we find acceptance before God, satisfaction, and peace when we understand and believe that our sins are forgiven, so also is His life, as