



Gospel / Life

Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

New Creation Teaching Ministry: Tuesday Night Studies 2011, Seacliff Anglican Church

Study 23: The Burnt Offering and Our Life In God's World (1)

I am the LORD your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must follow my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the one who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD. (Lev. 18:2b-5)

When Israel was in Egypt and then later liberated and sent out to make their way to Canaan, they were in the midst of surrounding people groups, each with their religions and cultures. The chorus line of Leviticus, "I the LORD am your God; be holy for I, the LORD am holy", stressed that they were not to be shaped by those surrounding cultures and religions. They had been liberated into sharing in the LORD's holiness, and the whole of the sacrificial system was there to induct into and maintain them in holiness. This was not a mere religious state; the holiness of the LORD worked its way through every aspect of life. The daily life expression of the burnt offering was a life lived in devoted obedience to the LORD.

These words in Leviticus are paralleled by many exhortations in the New Testament to no longer follow the pattern of the surrounding culture, but to make a clean and clear break from it and to live lives determined by the holiness of God who has brought us to Himself:

There, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Rom. 12:1-2b)

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1Cor. 6:9-11)

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate," says the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2Cor. 6:14-7:1)

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old Man, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new Man, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:17-24)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1Pet. 2:9-12)

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what the pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.... (1Pet. 4:3-4)

Clearly there is an expectation that coming to Christ means a break with the surrounding culture in moral matters. This break is entirely grounded in what God has done. We are those who have received mercy, been washed, sanctified and justified from our past sins, joined to Jesus Christ, and made the people of God, chosen, holy, and set apart for Him. We are the beloved sons and daughters of the Father. The connection we had with our previous lives has been broken in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And being gripped and held by this action of God, this inexpressible mercy and kindness, our whole being is thrown into giving expression to the new situation in which we find ourselves.

So we refuse to be conformed to old patterns. The idea of being conformed is that of being placed in a mould or a girdle: pressure is put on to force us into certain behaviours and ways of being. That pressure can be social and cultural, as well as directly personal. There is a large aspect of Christian living which means we refuse to be shaped by our surrounding culture (even while there are some aspects of culture that are neutral or even good.) Jesus prayed for the church before his crucifixion that we be sanctified by the truth, i.e. that we give expression to the truth that whilst we are here in the world for God's mission, our lives are not determined by what happens in the world, but by the truth of God (John 17:15-17). We are to seek to avoid all connection with sin and wickedness, turning from it when it intrudes in our space. We are to resist the devil, and as we do, we find that he flees (James 4:7).

This involves *mortification* of the flesh, or as Paul puts it in Ephesians 4, the *putting off* of the old Adam. There is a necessary engagement of our wills in this process. The key is that we turn our face primarily to the Lord Jesus, the new Adam, rather than looking too long and hard at our sin which is connected to the old Adam). Putting off happens best when something else is being put on! Obsession with "dealing with our sins" may often lead to more sinning. Focus on Christ primarily!

More, we also are to seek actively to give full expression to the transformation that has happened to us in the gospel. "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds." The renewing of the minds really means that we think quite differently now! Our wills have been gripped by a new thrust, to love and serve God with all we have and

are. In 2Cor. 7:1 Paul describes this as “perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” To perfect holiness is an unusual phrase, but it really means that we give ourselves to seeing the sanctifying work of God in Christ reach its full goal in us.

In the coming weeks, we are going to explore some of the very practical exhortations that we find in the Epistles of the New Testament as they follow through this theme. We will link these exhortations to the code of holy life that we find in the second half of Leviticus. And so we will see that the whole of life is the arena for the glorifying and praising of God. Our sexuality, work, relationships, speech, character, place in society, regard for government, and many other things are all seen to be the place in which we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.