

Leviticus 3 — Fellowship Offering

December 6, 2015

When was the last time you went to a good party? When was the last time you went to a party with lots of good food? I am talking about chips, dip, salsa, hot wings, steak and a great relish tray. When was the last time you went to a party because you had something to celebrate?

Unfortunately Christians are not known as the partying crowd. When we read the Bible, we get a different picture. Did you know that as Christians we should not be known for partying less, but for partying more? We are a people that celebrates God's goodness. Today, we will find out why.

If you are new, I would like to welcome you. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. In the five weeks leading up to Christmas we are in a small series called Christmas from the Book of Leviticus. Leviticus is an Old Testament book many of us ignore because it is filled with obscure instructions on Old Testament worship. As we have learned in the last two weeks of this series, this book isn't as irrelevant as it first appeared. The first seven chapters describe five offerings the Israelites used in worship. For the five weeks leading up to Christmas we are studying one offering a week. As we study the offerings, we are not just learning about Old Testament worship. These offerings also teach us about God and our relationship with him. They also teaching us about Christ and why he came at Christmas.

This morning, we turn to Leviticus 3 where we learn about the peace offering. Sometimes it is also called the fellowship offering.

Since each of these offerings is dependent on the others and since we are halfway through the series, let's begin with a little recap.

An overview of the offerings

1	Burnt Offering — Atonement for Sin
2	Grain Offering — Thankfulness for God's Gifts
3	Fellowship Offering - Celebrate God's Goodness
4	Sin Offering
5	Guilt Offering

1. Burnt Offering — The first offering

we studied in Leviticus 1 is called

the burnt offering or the whole burnt offering. A worshipper brought a bull, sheep, goat, and if they were poor, they brought pigeons or turtle doves to the tabernacle. For the four-footed animals the worshipper put his hand on the head of the animal. He confessed his general sinfulness over the animal.

The animal became identified with his sin. Then he killed the animal by slitting its throat. The animal died in his place to temporarily cover his sin.

The priest took blood from the animal and threw it on the sides of the altar as a way of saying that animal's blood covered his sin. The worshipper then cut up the animal. He gave all of the animal to the priest who burned the whole thing, except for the skin, on top of the altar. This sacrifice of atonement

temporarily covered the worshipper's sin, bringing him into a relationship with God because a substitute died in his place for his sin. We learned this points to Jesus and what he came to do. Jesus came to be the once-for-all burnt offering that didn't just cover our sins but paid for all of them. Jesus doesn't need to die repeatedly sacrificed instead he died once and for all. When we dedicate our lives to Jesus and ask Christ to pay for our sin, Jesus becomes

our once-for-all burnt offering to take care of our sin and bring us into a relationship with God.

2. **The Grain Offering** — Last week we looked at the second offering, the grain offering of Leviticus 2. The grain offering was the response of someone that had her sins atoned for by the burnt offering. In thankfulness to God for saving them from their sin and for providing their daily bread people brought a portion of their daily bread to offer on the altar giving thanks to God. This was either uncooked fine flour or cooked fine flour. It was always given without leaven or honey because they both caused decay, which represented sin. They were always given with salt, which was a preservative that represented God's covenant promises to his people. This offering was given with a heart of thanksgiving to God for his general goodness in meeting the worshippers' daily needs. This offering also pointed forward to Jesus who said he was the bread of life. Just as God provided the physical bread to sustain daily life he also sustains our spiritual lives every day as we eat on him.

That tells us the purpose of the first two offerings.

In the following two weeks, we will look at the purpose of the final two offerings. They are the sin offering and the guilt offering. These were offered when someone fell out of a relationship with God because they sinned against God or others. If you wanted to be brought back into a good relationship with God and others after you sinned, you offered the sin and guilt offerings.

Today we are looking at the middle offering in the group called the peace offering. Sometimes it is called the fellowship offering.

What was the purpose of the peace (fellowship) offering?

While calling this the peace offering is a very accurate translation of the Hebrew, it can lead to misunderstanding.

When we think of a peace offering we picture a husband that forgot his anniversary. At the last minute he runs to the florist to bring home flowers as a peace offering to appease the anger of his wife. That is not what is meant by the peace offering in Leviticus 3.

1. The peace offering was giving to celebrate that you had God's favor, not to get God's favor. This was not an offering given because things were going wrong, but it was an offering given to celebrate things were going right.
2. This was a voluntary offering. This means it was not required. You could offer a cow, bull, sheep or goat but not pigeons. There was no provision for the poor to offer a fellowship offering. That is ok. Remember it was optional.
3. This is the party offering. In this offering the worshipper offered all of the animal to the Lord but he got back all of the meat on the animal to have a party with his family, friends and neighbors as they celebrated God's goodness in their lives. This is why this offering is sometimes called the fellowship offering. It is an offering that gets people together to celebrate God's goodness.

This offering could be beef, sheep or goat. Let's walk through the beef offering then we will look at the other two.

How did they celebrate the all-beef party?

If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, 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 entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar. And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as a food offering to the Lord, he shall offer the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. Then Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, which is on the wood on the fire; it is a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord. Leviticus 3:1–5 (ESV)

The first way to offer the fellowship offering was to offer an animal from the herd.

Picture a massive church-wide party where they serve all-you-can-eat steak. This is my favorite. Every red-blooded man and most red-blooded women show up at the tabernacle when someone offers a fellowship offering because it means all-you-can-eat steak meal is served. This really drive up attendance at the worship service.

The first thing we notice is that while the burnt offering needed to be a bull, the fellowship offering could be a cow or a bull. Why could you offer a cow instead of a bull? The burnt offering was to represent Christ. Christ is a man so the burnt offering was a male. This offering does not represent Christ. It is a food offering. When you grind a cow or a bull into hamburger, it tastes the same. It doesn't matter which one you offer. You are going to eat it.

One thing that did matter is this offering was to be without blemish. A constant theme throughout all the offerings in Leviticus is the animals offered to God had to be your best because God deserves our best. Offering a sick animal, a defective animal or a deformed animal was a way of insulting God, not honoring God. The grain offered in the grain offering was to be made from fine flour which was ground from the finest inner kernels of the wheat. Why did God

demand the best? It was a way of acknowledging that God deserves our best, not our leftovers. In the same way, we give our best to God in our offering, of ourselves in service to God. God deserves it.

Next the worshipper laid his hand on the head of the cow or bull to identify with it. Then he killed it at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Aaron's sons threw the blood on the side of the altar. Next the worshipper cut up the animal. Notice that the fat, the liver and the kidneys were given by the worshipper to the priest who put them on the altar. The priest put the liver, kidneys and the fat on top of the burnt offering of the day symbolizing that it was only because of the substitute that died in the worshipper's place that they had peace with God and his favor.

Why did God get the fat? In those days fat was considered a delicacy. Fat makes meat tasty. Fat was considered the best part of the animal. God gets the fat because God gets the best.

Why was God given the liver and the kidneys? In those days the liver and kidneys were considered the seat of the emotions. Today we say, "I love you with all of my heart." In those days they said, "I love you with all of my kidneys" (Job 19:27). I know that doesn't sound romantic. Giving God the liver and the kidneys on the altar was a way of saying, "I love you with all of my heart."

As God's fire on the altar consumed the fat portions of the animal and the inner organs, God's people were celebrating God's goodness just outside of the tabernacle with an amazing meal of steak, lamb or goat.

Who were required invites on the guest list?

One group of people God insisted everyone put on the guest list for their parties were the priests. This isn't described in Leviticus 3 but in Leviticus 7, which is the commentary on Leviticus 3.

The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons. And the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice of your peace offerings. Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion. For the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed I have taken from the people of Israel, out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel. Leviticus 7:31–34 (ESV)

The worshipper brought the breast meat, the right thigh, the fat, the liver and the kidneys to the altar. The priests traditionally took the breast meat and took it from your hands waiving it back and forth as a wave offering from God.

The priest that did the extra work of collecting the blood from the animal and throwing it on the sides of the altar received a special portion. He received the right thigh. The priest that took the right thigh from you put his hands under your hands and waved it up and down as a wave offering to symbolically give and receive it from God.

I will put in a plug for the staff. The obvious implications of this passage is we should also have parties celebrating God's goodness in our lives. If you want to be really biblical on this, you need to invite the church pastors to your party. I am also putting in a request for the meat off the right thigh.

By the way, if you see us waving a piece of meat back and forth then up and down while at your party, don't get worried. It is just the Old Testament way of thanking God for a great meal and your generosity.

How did they celebrate the mutton and chevon party?

The offering of a sheep and a goat is almost identical to the offering of beef with one small difference. I will read you the section about offering the sheep and we will skip the details on offering the goat because it is identical to the all-beef fellowship offering.

If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the Lord is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. If he offers a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the Lord, lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it in front of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. Then from the sacrifice of the peace offering he shall offer as a food offering to the Lord its fat; he shall remove the whole fat tail, cut off close to the backbone, and the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. And the priest shall burn it on the altar as a food offering to the Lord. Leviticus 3:6–11 (ESV)

I know I am a boy that didn't grow up in Iowa, and I don't know much about animals, but I have seen a sheep or two. They don't have a fat tail. They don't have much of a tail. What is this teaching about the fat tail?

I did a little research and discovered there is a breed of sheep in the Middle East that has a fat tail section. You ladies that say no matter what you eat it gives you a moment pleasure on the lips but it stays a lifetime on the hips. This sheep is your kind of animal.



That is genetically what happens. They put all of their fat in their back side. Pastor Dave, who is a vet, thinks this is a fat repository similar to a camels hump.

Since God got all the fat, God got the fat tail.

The fellowship offering could be a corporate celebration.

The fellowship offering was sometimes celebrated corporately at high points in Israel. For example, the fellowship offering was offered to celebrate when a priest was ordained (Leviticus 9:18, 22). The fellowship offering was offered to celebrate the Feast of Harvest as a way of thanking God for a great crop (Leviticus 23:19-20). When God established his covenant with Israel at Sinai, the Israelites celebrated God making them his chosen people by offering a nationwide fellowship offering (Exodus 24:5). When Israel entered the Promised Land after crossing the Jordan, the Israelites celebrated their arrival in the land by offering fellowship offerings (Deuteronomy 27:7). When Saul was appointed king of the nation they celebrated with fellowship offerings and a national party celebrating his new kingship (1 Samuel 11:15). Most memorable was when Solomon was appointed king. He celebrated his coronation with a fellowship offering of 142,000 animals that provided enough food for the entire nation to party for almost two weeks (1 Kings 8:63-64).

The fellowship offering could be personal celebration.

While this offering was sometimes celebrated nationally with lots of animals, in Leviticus 3, it is talking about a personal celebration of the fellowship offering. Why would an individual like you or me slaughter a bull, sheep or goat and invite friends to the tabernacle to party with God? Reasons for someone personally celebrating the fellowship offering are found in Leviticus 7. Since it is a lengthy read I will just summarize the reasons.

1. **Unexpected blessing from God** — Leviticus 7:11-15 — If God blessed your life in a way you didn't expect and your heart was full of thanks, you were to

celebrate by offering a fellowship offering. For example, maybe your business had a banner year—throw a fellowship offering party to thank God for his goodness. Maybe you finally landed a job after months of looking. The way you thanked God and blessed others was by throwing a fellowship offering party and inviting your family, friends and neighbors over to celebrate.

2. **Making a vow to God or answered prayer from God** — Leviticus 7:16-18

— This is a little foreign to our way of thinking but sometimes people ask God to bring them through tough situations in life. In response to God answering their prayers they were to celebrate with a fellowship offering party. Today this is similar to someone prayerfully asking God to deliver them from cancer or to carry them through a risky heart surgery. When God delivers them from cancer or the risky heart surgery is successful at the one-year anniversary of their clean bill of health they should celebrate with a party thanking God for his goodness and his answer to their prayers.

3. **Filled with thankfulness for God's goodness** — Leviticus 7:16-18 —

Sometimes you didn't have an unexpected blessing from God or a particularly noteworthy answer to prayer but your heart was just filled with thankfulness to God for his goodness toward you and your family. You could still celebrate with a fellowship offering. This may be celebrating your son's graduation party from high school or celebrating your retirement with family and friends.

In many ways this offering resembles the burnt offering. The notable difference is there is no version of this offering for the poor. Why couldn't the poor offer a fellowship offering?

1. The poor could only afford a few pigeons or doves. If you have ever shot a dove you know the meat you get off the bird is the size of a chicken nugget. That is not enough for a party.
2. When you slaughtered an animal, you had a lot of meat. God wanted you to invite the poor to your fellowship offering party to celebrate with you and to bless them with the meal. To ensure you did that God had a special policy called the no doggy bag policy.

Why didn't God allow doggy bags?

Leviticus 7 has some interesting regulations for this meal.

And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering. He shall not leave any of it until the morning. But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and on the next day what remains of it shall be eaten. But what remains of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burned up with fire. Leviticus 7:15–17 (ESV)

If you slaughtered a cow or a bull as a fellowship offering you had to invite a lot of people if you were going to eat the entire cow in one or two days. This ensured a fellowship offering party was a big event!

I did a little Internet research. According to Wiki Answers if the average person eats 8 ounces of meat, a cow has enough meat on it to feed 1,400 people. That is a big party!

Did they have a fellowship offering in the New Testament? Love feasts!

Some of us are wondering if this fellowship offering party ever translated into the New Testament or if it was lost in history. The burnt offering pointed forward to Jesus and what he came to do. The grain offering and the drink offering pointed to the bread and the cup of communion. What about the

fellowship offering? When we study the New Testament we find hints that the early church didn't just gather for communion. The early church gathered for something called a love feast that was followed by communion. Love feasts are talked about in the writings of the early church fathers. Look at these verses that hint at a party meal focused around Jesus.

These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; Jude 12 (ESV)

I simply want to point out that the church had big meals called feasts where they gathered to celebrate God's love.

Paul talked to the Corinthians about the sinful way they celebrated their love feasts. The rich people brought expensive picnic baskets of food and hung out in one corner while others brought a six pack of beer and went to another corner to get drunk. The poor came to the love feast and had nothing but the complimentary church toothpick to put in their mouths. Nobody was sharing. Look what Paul said about this.

For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. 1 Corinthians 11:21–22 (ESV)

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for (share with) one another— if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come. 1 Corinthians 11:33–34 (ESV)

The love feast was to be like a potluck. People were to bring their food and pool their dinners so the poor had something to eat and the rich shared their

bounty. In the Corinthian church, people didn't share with others. Some people were hungry while others drank so much they were drunk.

My point simply is the early church had regular meals together, usually around communion, that were parties thanking God for Jesus.

The Old Testament fellowship offerings were feasts to celebrate God's blessing, and they blessed the poor with a meal because they were invited, and they ate well.

The New Testament love feasts were also meals to celebrate God's love and to bless others. The poor were to be blessed off the abundance of the rich as everyone shared a meal together.

Move this to modern day and this is why we have a monthly potluck after church. It is a type of corporate fellowship offering like Leviticus 3. It is similar to the love feast of the New Testament church. It is a free will offering so the poor can afford it and the rich can give generously to help provide it. It is one of the ways we celebrate God's goodness.

The fellowship offering teaches us to remember God's goodness by celebrating his blessings.

The fellowship offering teaches us we are to celebrate God's goodness. Since God paid for our sin through Jesus, the ultimate burnt offering, we should be known as thankful people. One of the ways that thankfulness shows up is when we throw parties thanking God for his unexpected blessings and answered prayers.

I go back to the question I asked as this message began. When was the last time you threw a party to celebrate God's goodness in a specific area of your life? When was the last time you invited people over your house for a party?

When a son or daughter is baptized, make sure you celebrate. When your baby is dedicated in church, make sure you celebrate. When God answers your prayers, don't forget to celebrate. When you retire, it is good to throw a party to celebrate God's goodness. When you have an unexpected promotion or an unusually good harvest on the farm, throw a party as a way of thanking God for his goodness. The key is to have a party not just for the sake of having a party. We are to have a party to celebrate God's goodness toward us in a specific area of life.

One good suggestion for a way to apply the sermon is for you to throw a fellowship offering party for Christmas. Throw a Christmas party where you invite your family and friends over your house to let everyone know how thankful you are for Jesus. Have good food. You don't have to decorate everything in red and green. Just make sure the party is celebrating God's goodness.

Are fellowship offering parties optional? Yes. This offering was optional. While it wasn't required, it was good. My friends, we are to be a thankful people that celebrates God's goodness.



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