

WHOLE

"God is not really interested in our religious activities, our religious busyness, our religious fervor or emotionalism. He is interested in the kind of character we display. He wants us to be whole and holy. In our homes, in our businesses, in our schools, in our neighborhoods, He wants people to see His holy character shining through our lives, expressed through the qualities of love, joy, peace, forgiveness, patience, and understanding we show to the people around us. That is the character of a whole person."
— Ray Stedman

Now, wholeness is a focal point of one of my favorite books in the Bible, Leviticus. The theme of Leviticus is given in 20:26: "You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine."

Perhaps you were turned off right away by the word holy in this passage. I do not know what you think holy means. You probably read into it things from your past experience which make it unpalatable to you. Most of us associate it with some kind of grimness. We think of holy people as those who look as if they have been steeped in vinegar or soaked in embalming fluid. I used to think of the word that way, and holiness was not attractive to me at all. It repelled me. But I ran across a verse in Scripture which spoke of "the beauty of holiness" (1 Chronicles 16:29, 2 Chronicles 20:21, Psalms 29:2, 96:2). I asked myself, "What in the world is beautiful about holiness?"

When I found out I agreed that holiness is indeed a beautiful thing...

Others associate it with strangeness, apartness, as though holy people are weird, peculiar individuals who live out in the desert somewhere, remote from the rest of us. We think of them as "different."

But the Bible itself suggests none of these ideas concerning holiness. If you want to get at the meaning of this word you must go back to its original root. This word is derived from the same root from which a very attractive English word comes. This is the word wholeness. So that holiness means "wholeness," being complete. And if you read wholeness in place of holiness everywhere you find it in the Bible you will be much closer to what the writers of that book meant. We all know what wholeness is: It is to have together all the parts which were intended to be there, and to have them functioning as they were intended to function.

That is what God is talking about. He says to this people, "you shall be whole, because I am whole." God is complete; he is perfect. There is no blemish in God; he lives in harmony with himself. He is a beautiful person. He is absolutely what a person ought to be. He is filled with joy and love and peace. He lives in wholeness. And he looks at us in our brokenness and says to us, "You, too, shall be whole."

That word wholeness has power to awaken desire within us. We long to be whole people. Don't you? Don't you want to be what God made you to be, with all the ingredients of your personality able

to be expressed in balance. That is to be a beautiful person, and that is what God is after. That is what the book of Leviticus is all about. In fact, the whole Bible is on that theme.

We are so aware of our own brokenness, of our lack of wholeness. We know how much we hurt ourselves and each other. We are aware of our inability to cope with life. We sometimes put up a big facade and try to bluff our way through as though we are able to handle anything. But inside, half the time, we are running scared. That is a mark of our lack of wholeness. We also know our diabolical power to irritate, to enrage, and to inflame others -- and ourselves...

Man has lost his way. He was made in the image and likeness of God. When man first came from the hand of God he was whole. Adam functioned as God intended man to function. He was functioning in the image and the likeness of God. But now we have lost that likeness. We still have the image, but the likeness is gone. God determines to heal man's brokenness and to make man whole again. And he knows how to do it -- he says so: "You shall be whole; for I am whole, and I have separated you from the peoples." It is a process of separation. The reason we are so broken is that we are involved in a broken race: Our attitudes are wrong. Our vision of life is twisted and distorted. We believe illusions, take them to be facts, and act upon them. We are following phantoms and fantasies and delusions.

So God must separate us. He has to break us loose from conformity to the thought patterns and the

attitudes and reactions of those around us. He has to deliver us from all that, straighten out our thinking, set our minds and hearts aright, and correct our tangled, fouled relationships. This is a process which takes infinite patience and love, because it is voluntary -- God never forces us into it. It can occur only to those who trust God enough to respond to his love."

In the book of Leviticus, we find a five fold system of religious sacrifices that illustrates God's path to wholeness.

...we see that the order of the offerings is significant... the first three, ...dealt with the basic needs of men and women for love (the burnt offering), joy (the grain offering), and peace (the peace offering). Love, joy, and peace are the basic needs of human life. Without them, we cannot function effectively as human beings. This is the same order that these fruits of the Spirit are listed in Galatians 5:22-23--love, joy, and peace.

Only after symbolically dealing with these basic human needs does God begin to talk about sin and trespass, the next two offerings. In the final two offerings, God deals with another basic requirement of humanity. We need not only the positive virtues of love, joy, and peace, but also to behave as responsible individuals. The sin and trespass offerings call us to act responsibly toward God and toward the people around us.

It is important to notice the order of the five sacrifices because the sacrifices tell us something important about the mind of God. Notice where He begins. While all

five of the sacrifices of Leviticus were fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, each sacrifice expresses a different aspect of His death, a different blessing that flows from His sacrifice. The first three blessings that come to us from the sacrifice of Jesus are love, joy, and peace. That is what the first three sacrifices speak of.

Then, in the final two sacrifices, the sin and trespass offerings, we see yet another blessing that flows to us from the cross of Christ: the forgiveness of sin. Now consider this: What is the first blessing we always think of when we reflect on the cross of Christ? Forgiveness! We always start our understanding of the cross with the issue of forgiveness--but that is not where God starts!

When we preach the Christian gospel, the first thing we usually say is, "You're a sinner! You need to be forgiven!" And sometimes we thunder away with hellfire and damnation at people in order to get them under conviction, to make them aware of the guilt that results from their sins. Its true, of course, that God wants to talk to human beings about sin. Men and women can never solve their problems until they solve the sin problem.

But we must remember that this is not where God starts. He begins by talking about love, joy, and peace. He provides these three blessings first. Then He says, "Now let's get at the heart of the problem that separates us." Isn't that marvelous?

The heart of the problem:

... There was only one inflexible

requirement [regarding the sin and trespass offerings]: that the sinner admit his or her sin. The individual had to confess to the act of wrongdoing against God. It wasn't that God demanded repayment for the sin. Human beings cannot repay God for sinning against Him. But God required that people make restitution, if only to the extent of confessing that the act of wrongdoing was truly wrong. Confession of sin was essential to obtaining forgiveness through the sacrificial offering of the animal.

The truth that is depicted here in these sacrifices is the same truth we read about in the New Testament letters of John: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

God insists that we admit and confess our sin--not because He wants to humiliate us but because confession is necessary in order for us to receive the forgiveness which He has already provided. It isn't that God forgives us at the moment we confess. He has already forgiven us. But we can't accept that forgiveness until we see and understand the truth about what we have done. That is why it is necessary for us to admit our wrongs before we can experience His cleansing forgiveness.

This is a fundamental principle for curing broken relationships within human society. We must come to a place where we face and admit our sins. We must admit our sin specifically, clearly, and

unequivocally. It does no good to simply say, "If I have offended you, please forgive me." That word "if" cancels out everything else you say. It is a denial of your own recognition of sin. When someone says, "If I have done something wrong," he is really saying, "You may see what I did as wrong, but I don't, and I won't admit it. If you think I did something wrong, then I'm sorry you feel that way, but I don't agree." That is not an admission of guilt, and it does not result in healing, forgiveness, or a reconciled relationships.

There are times in human relationships when we must do things that are right but painful, such as confront people who are living in a sinful lifestyle. At such times, we can be sorry that we have to hurt someone by speaking the truth to them in love--yet we are not sinning by doing so, we are doing what is right. A doctor may say, "I'm sorry" when doing something that causes a patient to feel pain--but the doctor is not doing something wrong. Sometimes a doctor must cause a little pain in order to bring about healing. So we need to understand that not every incident of causing pain or hurt to someone else is necessarily a sin.

But when we do sin against other people, God wants us to admit it to ourselves and confess it to God and to the person we have sinned against. God wants us to come to a place where we say, "Yes, I was wrong. I sinned, and I have no excuses to offer. Please forgive me."

Only at this point can a relationship be restored. In most broken relationships, it is necessary

for both parties to seek forgiveness. Each person must begin with himself or herself. As Jesus said, "First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5).

Jesus talked about this very principle when He said, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). God is more pleased with our integrity and our healed relationships than He is with our religious offerings.

God provided the trespass offering and fulfilled it in Jesus Christ, so that we might heal the broken relationships of the past and live our lives with a clear conscience. If you want to have a vital relationship with God, you may need to heal the broken relationships of the past--relationships with friends, neighbors, and family members. You may need to make restitution and confess your sins and errors. But once you do, those relationships will be healed before God, and you will experience emotional and spiritual freedom for the rest of your life.

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