

The Sin Offering

To read:

1. Leviticus 4
2. Leviticus 5:1-13, 6:24-30

1 I. Introduction

A. This morning we are continuing our study of Leviticus together

1. As we start another morning in Leviticus, I want to remember what the main point of Leviticus is - how can Israel dwell with a holy God? And, as we apply it to ourselves, how can we dwell with a holy God?
2. And, if we put our outline up on the board, we're in the first half of the book, what we've titled "Judicial Holiness," which is answering the question, "How do we become holy?"
3. And we're continuing in the first subsection, what we've titled "Provision for holiness" in Leviticus 1-7 which describes the sacrificial system

1 B. And we see five types of sacrifice as we read these first chapters of Leviticus

1. Several weeks ago we started with the Burnt Offering and talked about propitiation and satisfying God's wrath
 - 2 a. So, if we go back to our table that we started last week, the burnt offering taught us that sin has made God very angry with us, sin has provoked God's wrath
 - 1 b. So we need a sacrifice that will absorb and turn away God's wrath, a sacrifice that will make us acceptable before God again
2. Then we looked at the Grain Offering and considered how we owe ourselves in worship to God
 - 1 a. And the Grain Offering didn't fit very well on our table because it wasn't a sacrifice like the other sacrifices, it didn't exist to cover sin in some way, so we set it off at the bottom
 - 2 b. The Grain Offering shows us that we belong to God so we owe ourselves to God in worship
3. Third, we looked at the Peace Offering and considered fellowship with God and with others
 - 1 a. The peace offering was a blood sacrifice again, so it told us something about sin - sin breaks fellowship, primarily with God, but also with each other
 - b. So we need a sacrifice that restores fellowship, that repairs relationships
- 2 4. This week we're moving on to the fourth offering in Leviticus, the Sin Offering
- 1 5. And next week we are going to finish the offerings by looking at the Guilt Offering

1 C. Proposition: The sin offering shows us that sin is filthy, and we need to be cleansed; and it promises that there will be a sacrifice that can wash away the stain of sin.

- 1 1. What did it teach the ancient Israelites about God?
- 1 2. How should this point us to Christ?
- 1 3. How should this be applied to the New Testament believer?

1 II. What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?

- 1 A. As we try to understand this offering, I want to start with some initial observations, and there are four words that define this offering: 'unintentional,' 'sin offering,' 'atone,' and 'forgive' - understanding these words will help us understand this offering
1. So let's start with 'unintentional' - the Hebrew word translated in many translations as 'unintentional' is the word that is used to describe the sin for which the Sin Offering is offered
 - 2 a. It's even used at the very head of the instructions in Leviticus 4:2 - "*Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them,* - and then it's repeated multiple times throughout the passage
 - b. I think the word here is translated 'unintentionally' because this word is used to describe the type of manslaughter that was different than murder in the passages describing the cities of refuge and it makes a lot of sense in that passage - manslaughter is unintentional, murder is intentional
 - c. And the word does seem to have some sense of intentionality to it - a few times it is described a sin that was hidden from the eyes, a sin that was unknown and is contrasted with high-handed sins in Numbers 15 or extremely presumptuous sinning in Deuteronomy 29
 - d. So 'unintentional' isn't a bad translation, but the word itself means 'to err,' 'to stray,' or 'to wander' - in fact one commentator says this, "*the sense of the verb shagag will be adequately caught if all the verses concerned here in Leviticus 4-5, the phrase 'sins unintentionally' is rendered by 'goes astray in sin' or 'does wrong' or the like.*"
 - e. Sometimes this word is even used of the action of sheep, sheep tend to go astray, they wander off into places that are not good for them, places outside the care of the shepherd
 - f. So the word does carry some sense of unintentionality, although not necessarily in the sense of accident but rather not grossly premeditated, not presumptuous, not high-handed, not a rejection of God as King
 - g. But perhaps this word here isn't meant primarily to describe the type of sin that needs to be covered by this sacrifice but rather a dimension of sin that must be covered by sacrifice
 - 1 h. Sin is a wandering, a going astray, a leaving the protection of the shepherd and traipsing through the muck and ick of the world - sin is going astray and becoming polluted, which starts to hit at the center of this offering - the Sin Offering is an offering that purifies, that washes from the pollution of wandering sin
 - i. This explains why this sacrifice is often used across the pages of the Old Testament to deal with the concept of uncleanness - if you have become unclean, the Sin Offering will make you clean again, it will wash you when you have wandered and become polluted
 - 1 2. The next word I want to consider is the word translated in English as 'sin offering'
 - 1 a. Again, we see it multiple times across the passage, for example in Leviticus 4:3 - *then let him offer to the LORD a bull without defect **as a sin offering** for the sin he has committed*
 - 2 b. This is a place where I think our English translations deceive us slightly because there is no word that means 'sin offering' - the word 'sin' is found here twice, once as a noun and once as a verb
 - 1 c. A better translation - *then let him offer to the LORD a bull without defect **as sin** for the sin he has committed*
 - 1 d. That might not seem to be a huge difference, but I think it is going to help us understand this offering - that animal represents sin, it became sin for them, it is being destroyed and burned up as sin
 - 1 3. The last words I want to consider are the pair 'atone' and 'forgive'
 - 1 2 a. We see this pair throughout this passage, for example in Leviticus 4:20 - *And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.*
 - b. Forgiveness is a word that we all know and to some degree all understand, but when you try to succinctly define it, at least for me, it seems that any short definition misses important things about forgiveness
 - c. But we might say that forgiveness would be not taking offense, even renouncing the ability to take offense or to look at it a different way, we might say it is to wipe away the sin so that it can't offend any more
 - 1 2 d. In fact, Jeremiah uses this definition in Jeremiah 18:23 - *Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.*
 - 1 e. And I think that's what this pair of words, 'atone' and 'forgive', indicate here in the Sin Offering - to blot out, to wipe away, to cleanse so that sin can no longer cause offense
 4. So sin is wandering into pollution and pollution causes offense - we don't generally welcome dirty, smelly things into our houses - but a sacrifice is offered as sin to forgive and wash away the sin so that the offeror is clean again
 - a. Now that we understand the words in this passage, I think we can start to understand the teaching of this passage - what did the Sin Offering teach the ancient Israelites

1 B. First, sin contaminated and polluted them

1. The concept of uncleanness is not well defined in this chapter of Leviticus and we'll discuss uncleanness at length later in Leviticus, but the concept stands behind this passage
- 1 2. For example, Leviticus 5:1-3 - *"If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity; or if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean wild animal or a carcass of unclean livestock or a carcass of unclean swarming things, and it is hidden from him and he has become unclean..."*
3. Sin had made them unclean and the sin offering teaches that - sin doesn't just make God angry, it is objectively bad, it pollutes you, it makes you dirty, it's disgusting and the sin offering reminded the Israelites of that
4. Every time I wander away from God's commands I become filthy and everyone around me should be disgusted and God most of all - sin is dirty
5. And once I've been polluted by sin I carry that pollution with me, like a boy whose rolled around in the mud and then comes running into the house and jumps on the sofa - I pollute the things around me by my sin
6. If I remain like this, I will never be worthy of being accepted by anyone, especially by God - if I'm welcomed in while I'm filthy, I'll pollute everything - those polluted by sin cannot be welcome God's presence

1 C. So they needed to be washed from sin

1. If this corruption and pollution is the background of the sin offering, then this is the hope of the sin offering - I'm filthy but I can be made clean again
- 1 2. This is the purpose of some of the rituals associated with the sin offering, especially the sprinkling that happens, for example in Leviticus 4:6-7 - *and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.*
3. The blood of the sin offering served to wash away sin, first from the offeror - represented by sprinkling the blood on the side of the altar - and then from everything the offeror had polluted - represented by sprinkling the blood in front of the veil before the Lord to purify the sanctuary
4. So we could introduce another fancy word to talk about sacrifice - in the burnt offering we talked about propitiation, a sacrifice that made God happy again - now we can add expiation, a sacrifice that washes us from sin, that removes sin from us
5. Historically, there has been much theological debate as to whether the sacrifice of Christ was a propitiation, a sacrifice directed toward God to satisfy His wrath, or an expiation, a sacrifice to cleanse us from sin - but I see both across the entire Bible, God's wrath against sin must be satisfied, but we also must be washed from sin - sin must be propitiated and expiated; God must be satisfied and we must be clean and cleanness comes from the sin offering, an offering that washes away our sin

1 D. And that sin needed to be condemned and destroyed

1. So, imagine that you raise cattle - for some of you that doesn't take a whole lot of imagination - and for some reason one of your sons has gone out to the cow pasture and rolled around in wet cow pies until he was completely filthy - it's just dripping off of him - and then he runs back inside, runs all over your house and sits on all your furniture and you come in and find that - that would be an unpleasant situation, to say the least
2. That filth would need to be dealt with, we'd need to get rid of it - first, perhaps, we could hose down the wayward son and all the furniture he got dirty, but that still leaves all that filth right there, big chunks of cow pies laying there - something needs to be done with this huge pile of filth
3. And that's the second aspect of the sin offering, not only does it wash away sin, but it takes that sin and destroys it - I think this is why that animal is offered as sin - through the sacrifice the sin is removed from the offeror and transferred to that animal and that animal is treated as sin, it is destroyed and then carried outside the camp and burned so that the sin would no longer defile the camp
- 1 4. So Leviticus 4:11-12 - *But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung---all the rest of the bull---he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and shall burn it up on a fire of wood. On the ash heap it shall be burned up.*
5. The offeror was washed from the pollution of sin and then that sin was gathered up, condemned in death, cast outside the camp and then burned to remove it forever - it's gone, somebody gathered up all the cow dung, carried it back into the field and then lit it on fire so that it can't be tracked back into the house

1 3 2 E. Table and Kid's Question

1 III. How does this point us to Christ?

I want to think through how Jesus fulfilled this offering, and I think the answer is gloriously simple - Jesus is our sin offering

1 A. So Jesus shed His blood to wash us from the filth of sin

1. Jesus announced the intention of His ministry through the miracles that He did, Matthew 8:2-3 - *And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*
2. And, as Paul meditated on the sacrifice of Christ, he kept coming back to this idea of washing
 - 2 a. So, in Titus 3:4-7 - *But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration** and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*
 - 2 b. Or again, in I Corinthians 6:9-11 - *Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; **but you were washed**, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*
 - 2 c. And in Ephesians 5:25-27 - *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, **cleansing her by the washing with water through the word**, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*
3. And John tells us that this is the center of the promise in Jesus, that His blood would make us clean - I John 1:6-9 - *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, **and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin**. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins **and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**.*
4. And the author of Hebrews intentionally ties Jesus' sacrifice to the sin offering and the purification it brought
 - 1 a. I'll read sections of Hebrews 9 - *For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God...*
 - 1 *Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*
 - 1 *Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*
5. Jesus came to shed His blood so that we would be washed from sin once and for all - His blood has been our cleansing so that the pollution of sin doesn't cling to us anymore

1 B. And Jesus died to condemn and destroy sin

1. The sin offering didn't only wash from sin, but it itself became sin, it was offered as sin for sin so that that sin could be cast out and destroyed and Paul says that Jesus did exactly that, He offered Himself for sin
2. Romans 8:3 - *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh **and for sin, he condemned sin** in the flesh,*
3. So the one who had no sin became sin, II Corinthians 5:21 - *For our sake **he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***
4. And drawing directly from the sin offering, Hebrews 13:11-12 - *For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. **So Jesus also suffered outside the gate** in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.*
5. Jesus not only washed us from sin, He took that sin upon Himself and destroyed it, He was the animal slaughtered, carried outside the camp and burned - He said, here I'll take that sin and carry it to the cross so that an end can be made of sin, it no longer can pollute you, it can no longer cause offense
6. Sin was condemned and destroyed, the filth was purged, but we were made clean

1 C. So Jesus has made us worthy to present ourselves before God

1. This was the entire purpose of the Sin Offering - to purify the offeror and the sanctuary so that the offeror is worthy to be in God's presence and bring his worship - he won't be a stench to God
2. And through the Sin Offering of Jesus, we are made worthy, we are welcomed into God's presence
3. So the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 10:19-22 - *Therefore, brothers, since **we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus**, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, **with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.***
4. And Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:25-27 - *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, **and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.***
5. We are polluted, filthy in sin, but we have been washed in Jesus and God is happy to welcome us into His House, because we've been cleaned we won't pollute His sanctuary

1 D. In fact, this is one of the glorious promises made at the Last Supper

1. In Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospels, listen to the phrase that Jesus uses to describe the cup
2. Matthew 26:26-28 - *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, **which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.***
3. The blood was to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins - the concept is ripped right out of the sin offering, an offering whose blood would wipe away sins
4. So every time we come to the Table, we confess this truth - I come, not because I am clean, but because I can be made clean - I've failed this week, I've wandered in sin, I've polluted myself, but I can find forgiveness here in this shed blood, it can make me worthy to stand in God's presence again, I will be welcomed in His House
5. So I approach with confidence this holy place because of the blood of Jesus to partake in the blood of Jesus once more, to have my sins forgiven in His blood

1 IV. How does this apply to us?

As we finish our meditation on the Sin Offering, I want to think about what this passage means for us? How should we respond to the Sin Offering? I want to give three short exhortations based on the Sin Offering:

1 A. First, we should feel the dirtiness of sin

1. The purpose of the sin offering was to take those who were corrupted, polluted by sin and make them clean again, but if that's true, then the first thing we need to do is take an honest look at sin and feel how filthy, how revolting, how disgusting our sin is
- 3 2. As we meditate on the offering made for our sin, we ought to be like Isaiah in Isaiah 6:4-5 - *And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"*
3. When Isaiah was brought before the presence of God, he felt very deeply the uncleanness of his sin - he looked at himself and said, "I'm filthy" and he looked around and said, "we're all filthy" and he despaired at being in God's presence
4. We need to cultivate the same attitude, to be able to look on sin, especially our own sin, and see it's corruption, it's filth, to feel how deeply it needs to be cast out and destroyed
5. Now, that's not the end of our exhortation this morning, but it is the start - we need to see and to feel sin rightly because if we don't we're never going to grasp the glory of the offering that cleanses sin
6. The glory of Christ is magnified when we see sin rightly as it is, as detestable filth that corrupts us - we say that this great corruption needs and even greater cleansing

1 B. But that leads directly to our second exhortation, we should rejoice in Christ's cleansing

1. If we feel how dirty our sin is, how repugnant it is, then we should long deeply for something to cleanse us - so when we hear the promise of cleansing in Christ, the promise of the forgiveness of sins in His sacrifice, that ought to cause our hearts to rejoice with joy exceeding - the cure we so dreadfully needed has been found
- 1 2. So we'll cherish and act on promises like I John 1:9 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* - such words should be our heart's joy and stay, we do sin, but our sins can be washed away in the blood of Jesus
- 1 3. And so we run eagerly to Christ for cleansing, we heed Ananias' exhortation to Paul in Acts 22:16 - *And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'*
4. The glory of Christ is magnified when we run to him in confession for cleansing and rejoice in His promise - we say that He is the great cleanser and our hearts rest in Him

- 1 C. But the promise of cleansing in Christ should never be an excuse for presumptuous sinning because if we have been cleansed, we should be cleansing ourselves in Christ**
1. Unfortunately, the promise of cleansing can be heard by sinful hearts that rejoice in a license to sin - sin no longer matters, I can sin with impunity because I can always come back for cleansing
 12. But Peter has strong words for such thoughts, II Peter 2:22 - *For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."*
 - a. Peter says - such people are like dumb pigs, you can wash them up but they just run back to the mud - and he says that we can't be like that - if we've been made clean then we ought to pursue cleanliness
 - b. To treat the sacrifice of Christ as a license to sin is to misunderstand sin - it's filthy, it's dirty, it's disgusting - if you want to just clean up to be in God's presence periodically then you haven't really understood sin and you haven't really understood grace or come to Christ for cleansing
 - c. If you've come to Christ for cleansing, then you are going to love cleanliness, purging sin from your life is going to be your foremost goal - not because your fight against sin is what makes you clean, but because you have been made clean and the last thing you want to do is get dirty again
 13. And this is the common refrain of the new Testament, II Corinthians 7:1 - *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*
 14. Or again, Titus 2:11-14 - *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*
 15. Or again, I John 1:6-7 - *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*
 6. If we've been cleansed then we should be being clean - it only makes sense
 7. And the glory of Christ is magnified when we pursue holiness - we say that the cleansing He brought us is so precious that we never want to go back