



## Gospel / Life

### Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

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

#### **Study 14: The Guilt Offering**

##### **Making reparation for sins**

The guilt offering was, like the sin offering, offered to deal with the problem of sin. In particular though, the guilt offering had the purpose of making good or repairing the damage done in the relationship by the offence.

Leviticus 5:14-6:7 spells out the offerer's responsibilities in bringing this offering. Firstly, the offering was to be brought in certain circumstances:

1. When a person unintentionally sinned in regard to the Lord's holy things—i.e. he had left unfulfilled an obligation in his worship to God. Perhaps he had not brought a full tithe, or accidentally had left behind at home a dedicated offering.
2. When a person sinned by unknowingly breaking one of the Lord's commands. Perhaps he unknowingly had contacted something unclean and then come to the tabernacle in a defiled state.
3. When a person deceived his neighbour, being dishonest about a matter in way that benefited himself. For example, he might have lied about finding some lost property in order to keep it for himself

In each case, the offering was a part of the offerer making restitution for his failure. This act of reparation involved both returning what should have been done, and then giving an extra 20% loading as a penalty. The offerer also had to bring a ram as a guilt offering. (It seems from 7:7-10 that, as with the sin offering, if a person was too poor to afford a ram, other offerings could be brought.) This offering was to make atonement for the offence, and resulted in the offender being forgiven.

Once the reparation had been made, the priest would then make atonement with the animal. This was offered in basically the same way as the sin offering (the animal was slaughtered; the fat was burned; the animal's meat was eaten in a holy place by the priest who offered it and any male member of his family), except that there was no application of blood.

##### **The Guilt of Our Sinning**

There are clearly two elements to this particular offering: dealing with the damage caused by neglect, ignorance or deceit, and then making atonement for the offence. The two belonged intrinsically together. The actual offering for atonement could only be made once the offence had been made right through reparation and penalty.

The guilt of an offence is different to the damage it does. The guilt of an offence lies in relation to the holiness of God to whom we are answerable. The damage done by an offence may be against God, it may be against another person, but it is not exactly the same as the guilt of the offence. This is not the way our society views guilt. We live in an era where the right or wrong of an action (i.e. our estimation of its guiltiness or innocence) is in large part determined on whether it “hurt” somebody. Actions that are seen as “victimless” are considered innocent (even if thought to be distasteful.) To think this way is finally to remove God from the equation of human existence and accountability.

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then arranged for the death of Uriah, her husband, in battle, he did much damage to Uriah, to Bathsheba, to the child that Bathsheba had conceived, to the nation of which he was king, and to himself. Yet when he came to confess that sin, after Nathan the prophet exposed him, he said, “I have sinned *against the LORD* (2Sam. 12:13).” In his confessional psalm, written from this occasion, he says:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love.  
According to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.  
Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.  
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.  
Against you, *you only*, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. (Psa. 51:1-4a)

This is quite a breath-taking statement. It helps us see clearly that in all our actions at a human level there is also a God-ward aspect. The *sinfulness* of our actions relates to only this God-ward aspect. The way we treat one another stands under the judgment of God, who is the Father of us all. Not only do we owe it to others to love our neighbours as ourselves, we owe it to God to do so, for we are dealing with what belongs to Him when we deal with others.

### **The Damage of Our Sinning**

When we do wrong to God or our brothers and sisters, we inevitably do damage. We incur some loss on them by our failure. Some of what we do is irretrievably committed and undo-able. There is a great deal of pain for us as believers in seeing the damage done to others by our thoughtlessness, careless, laziness or plain nastiness, which we cannot repair once the action has been done. A person may have through foolishness cause the death of another in an avoidable car accident. Another person may have damaged someone’s reputation by malicious talk. We must in this situation believe on our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect offering, through whom God is making all things new, and through whom at the end of this current age God will take away all sorrow and tears forever. Part of our lives in this world is bearing the sadness of our failure before the Lord in faith that finally He will repair all the damage that has been done.

Having said that though, there are many damages that we have done that can and must be rectified. There is also value in adding a penalty to the rectification so that the seriousness of the damage done is acknowledged. Perhaps we have thought that God’s forgiveness of an offence we have committed means that we need to nothing more about it. If we think this way, we have failed to really consider just what our offending has meant for others. We have thought only about what it has meant for us, and are easily relieved when forgiveness is pronounced to us. In that way, forgiveness is simply about us “getting off the hook.” It is a perversion of the way we should think about God’s forgiveness. Forgiveness liberates us into loving others, not

ourselves! When forgiveness breaks through to us, we are not so concerned that things go well for us, but that they go well for others.

The story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) is a great example of how forgiveness and salvation make us sensitive to what we can do about the things we have done wrong. He was a wealthy tax collector who had used his position and power to cheat some people of more tax than they needed to pay (v. 8). The commission on this was a benefit to him. When Jesus came to his place for a meal, God's grace broke in on this man, he grew in moral stature and responsibility. His pledge that day showed that he wanted to do what he could to repair any damage that he had done. He vowed to give away half of his possessions to the poor, and more, to repay any amount that he had obtained deceitfully with not a 20% but a 300% penalty loading! When Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house!" he was in effect pronouncing Zacchaeus forgiven. Jesus was acting as his guilt offering.

The guilt offering teaches us that we are to take seriously our relationships with others and to give consideration to how our actions impact upon them. Not only that, but to take seriously how our actions impact in our relationship with God our Father. Saying sorry and confessing the wrong of what we have done may be a good first step, but it is inadequate if we do not think further about how we can make good what we have done. The freedom of grace teaches us to bear the responsibilities we have, not to shrug them off and let others bear the cost of our irresponsibility. Paul says to us that we should owe no person anything except the debt of love (Rom. 13:8), and urges that each of us should carry our own burdens (Gal. 6:5).

We also see that promises and obligations to the Lord must be fulfilled. God's grace does not give us the freedom of living sloppily and irresponsibly before Him. Where promises have been made to Him, freely entered into by us, we must fulfil them. Where we have not done as we have promised, it may be very good for us to impose the penalty of doing more in order to teach ourselves something of the holiness of the LORD.

*Recently I saw on the ABC's Australian Story the sad but moving story of a young man who had acted very foolishly. In the aftermath of the breakdown of his relationship with the mother of his daughter, he had become quite depressed and hopeless, and was often drunk. One night, in a drunken anger, he had joined with a friend in throwing rocks off a bridge at on-coming traffic. One rock had smashed through a window of a car and into the head of a young woman. She suffered extensive injuries and has since not regained fully her former memory or abilities. He was imprisoned for his actions, and has since been released. He knows much of what he has done is undo-able, and he has enormous regret and pain about that. But he is doing what he can to make reparation. He does this in a number of ways. Firstly, and most importantly, he is making regular payments, which the law obligates him to, to compensate the young woman and to assist in her ongoing therapy. He did not demand forgiveness from her, but did want to express his deep sorrow to her. Secondly, he is working with the police in speaking to school students about actions, their consequences and accepting responsibility. He does not do this as some kind of hero, but out of a sense of the obligation that his foolishness has placed upon him. Nothing in the show spoke of faith, and there was nothing in the story of how this all stood before the Holy One. But at a human level, there was something immensely admirable about this young man.*