

Elementary

*As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one.
(Romans 3:10 ESV)*

*If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
(1 John 1:8 ESV)*

What Does The Law Teach Us About Sin?

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Leviticus 4

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Introduction:

Good morning, turn with me in your bibles to the book of Leviticus, and turn to chapter 4. Today we are continuing our series in the book of Leviticus that we have called, "Elementary".

Last week, we heard this quote from John Calvin,

"The ceremonial law of the Jews was a tutelage by which the Lord was pleased to exercise, as it were, the childhood of that people, until the fulness of the time should come when he was fully to manifest his wisdom to the world, and exhibit the reality of those things which were then adumbrated (foreshadowed) by figures, (Gal. 3:24; 4:4)."¹

The Law was meant to teach us the elements of faith. It was like kindergarten for God's people. Now, the lessons found in Leviticus are still important - the teaching is still helpful - but we were never intended to stay as children under the tutelage of the Law.

These laws foreshadowed what was to come in Christ.

Everywhere we look in Leviticus, we will see glimpses of Jesus. God revealed Himself and His plan fully through the person of Jesus.

Before we came to Orillia, we had heard just how beautiful the view from Orillia was – overlooking Simcoe and Couchiching. But when Sienna and I arrived, we had a week of fog and mist and rain. When we came to the church, we were in Paul's office and we looked out the windows and Paul said, "Trust me, there is a lake there, the view is great." It was only a faint glimmer of the beauty that we would see.

What the Law hinted at, Jesus fully revealed to us.

¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), paragraph 3315.

Today, we want to look at one of these elementary principles that the Law teaches us about – sin.

In **Leviticus 4**, we see in this chapter the instructions for the Sin Offering.

The sin offering was a sacrifice that purifies someone if they have “sinned unintentionally.” This is contrasted in **Numbers 15** where it speaks about someone who sins with a “high-hand” - or intentionally and flagrantly sinned.

Sins that were considered “high-handed” sins – sins that came from a heart of rebellion and hard-heartedness to God - were not forgiven. Those sins resulted in either death or excommunication.

Just as we begin, it’s important to point this out – there is no sacrifice for sins that are done with full awareness and in full rebellion against God.

Hebrews 10:26-27 makes this point,

“²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”

Perhaps some of us today are here and are living in flagrant disobedience and defiance to God. We KNOW what God commands us, we KNOW what His word teaches, and yet we continue to sin with a “high-hand”.

Let me say this - the Lord is gracious to those who are repentant, but wrathful to impenitent.

We see that here in our passage. For sins that were committed out of weakness, out of ignorance, or out of forgetfulness, or if someone found themselves in sin and repented, there was a sacrifice for those sins.

So today, we want to learn some of the elementary principles that the Law teaches us about sin. When we read through Leviticus, we see how damaging and how destructive sin is, how egregious it is to God, and we get a glimpse of how the problem of sin will be dealt with.

But we also get a glimpse of a greater sacrifice, a greater high-priest, and a greater blood that cleanses more than the blood of bulls and goats ever could.

(5 MINUTES)

So let’s read from **Lev. 4:1-12**.

Hear now the Word of the Lord.

“4 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 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, ³ if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering. ⁴ He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill the bull before the LORD. ⁵ And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting, ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ And all the fat of the bull of the sin offering he shall remove from it, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails ⁹ 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 ¹⁰ (just as these are taken from the ox of the sacrifice of the peace offerings); and the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. ¹¹ But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung— ¹² 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.”

Amen.

What Does The Law Teach Us About Sin?

1. Sin is universal.

This fact, that we are ALL sinners, is the equivalent of learning how to “count to 10” of kindergarten education.

This is one of the first things we must learn in the kindergarten of Christianity.

What we see in our passage, and what is clear throughout the scriptures, is that sin is a universal problem!

We see in our passage how there was a process for every member of society for making atonement for their sins.

If you were a High-Priest, there was a process for you. (1-12)

If the entire congregation sinned, there was a process (13-21)

If you were a leader, there was a process for you. (22-26)

If you were a commoner, there was a process for you. (vs. 27-35)

There was even a process if you were a rich commoner, or a poor commoner.

Every single person had a process associated with them for receiving atonement for their sins.

There is no class division when it comes to sin – we are ALL sinners.

Ecclesiastes 7:20, *“Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”*
1 John 1:8, *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*

This is an ELEMENTARY principle – and if you don’t get this, you can’t learn the next lessons. If you can’t count to 10, then you’ll never get to 20, then 30, then 40.

Humans are not born innocent.
 Humans are not born inherently good.
 Because of original sin, we are quick to choose sin.

Thomas Watson says it this way, *“We are like a patient under the physicians care who has no sound apt in him – his head bruised, his liver is swelled, his lungs are gasping, his blood is infected, his feet are gangrened. Thus it is with us before saving grace comes!”*²

I get this can be confusing for some of us, because our culture tells us, “What comes NATURAL to you is good.” Our culture uses the defence, “I was born this way,” to justify itself and to give approval to certain desires.

But what the Bible reveals is that that our desires are twisted from their original design. We desire the things we should not! We want the things that will kill us! We chose rebellion!

Psalm 51:5 says, *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*

This is the first elementary lesson about sin that the Law teaches us – everyone needs to be forgiven. Everyone needs to find atonement. Everyone sins.

If we don’t learn this ELEMENTARY lesson, we will never find atonement. We’ll never get to God.

So, sin is universal.

2. Sin separates us from God.

In our text, we see that the congregation is not allowed anywhere near the Tabernacle, and the only people who are allowed close are the priests and the High Priest.

Look at **vs. 29-30** and the sin offering for the individual, **(11 MINUTES)**

“²⁹ And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering. ³⁰ And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar.”

² Thomas Watson, *Meditation: A Christian on the Mount*, (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1830), pg. 41.

There was a great chasm between God and His people. God resided in the Tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies, and His people could not approach Him however they wanted.

We heard about this last week: strict instructions were given on how to approach God.

One does not simply walk into God's presence.

Remember the story Pastor Paul told us last week about Nadab and Abihu – they were cavalier in their priestly roles and they ended up dead because they ignored the strict instructions given by God.

They played with fire, and they were consumed by it.

Why? Because they forgot the chasm that exists between us and God because of sin.

So the dilemma that Ancient Israel encountered when God moved into the camp: **how can God abide amongst His people when His people are sinners and God MUST be separate from sin?**

This is why the Tabernacle was built – it was because God desired to live amongst His people, but could not abide in their sin. God required a Holy, purified, and set apart place to abide.

This is why there needed to be a priesthood, there needed to be mediation between Israel and God. Notice how it repeats this line in vs. **26, 31, 35,**

“And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.”

God resided within the Tabernacle (even deeper within the Tabernacle in the Holy of Holies) where sin and impurity was not allowed, and He required a holy and purified priesthood to act as mediators between His wayward people and Himself.

The priests could come close, and the high-priest even closer on one day a year (Yom Kippur) but that separation could never be closed by humans.

There had to be distinction between the Holy One and the sinful ones!

We get this – this is why so many of us idolize actors. When we see them we shrink back in awe – because we have elevated their talent, intellect and influence and put them on a pedestal. If we see one another on the street, we go up and say hi. But if we see Tom Cruise walking down the street, I was stop and stare in awe. “Look! Is that Tom Cruise? At Mariposa?”

We instinctively get the difference between us and him. He is Tom Cruise. That's Maverick!

How much more is the separation between Almighty God, perfect and holy, and us His people?

So, the elementary lessons the law teaches us about sin is that sin is universal, and that sin separates us from God...

3. Sin spreads

A fascinating reality we see in this text, and we see it throughout the book of Leviticus, is that the sin of the individual spread within the corporate body.

Each person had a responsibility to the whole body to repent and make atonement for any sin. Rich or poor. Young or old. High Priest or Commoner.

Sin could not go un-atoned for, lest it corrupt the entire people.

(16 MINUTES)

We see an example of this in **Joshua 7** and the story of Jericho and Ai.

In Joshua, God tells Israel to retake the Promised Land, and that He will bless them and grant them victory. Israel wins the victory at Jericho, and there is great celebration. After the battle of Jericho, Israel goes to their next location, Ai, but is pathetically defeated.

Joshua tears his clothes and falls to the ground in tears, and cries out to the Lord, "Lord, why were we defeated?" and God tells Joshua, "Get off your face! Israel has sinned against me. That's why!"

Joshua 7 God says, *"They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies... Get up! Consecrate the people..."*

It is discovered that a man named Achan had disobeyed God's commands – God had commanded Israel to destroy everything and not take any of the spoils, and he disobeyed.

But do you see how it says, **"They** have taken. **They** have stolen and lied."

The sin of one made had spread to the congregation; sin had entered the camp, and the entire people suffered.

Cornerstone, we learn something very important here – the sins of one impact the many.

Many of us think that our lust, our lying, our anger, or our jealousy only impacts us, but there is a spiritual infection that sin causes in the Church.

We see this played out in **1 Corinthians 5**. In Corinth, there was a man who was engaged in an inappropriate sexual relationship with his father's wife, and Paul finds out that this sin was not only tolerated but approved of.

Paul warns the Corinthians of the spread of sin in **vs. 6-7**, *“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump.”*

We are united as one body, and my addiction to pornography, my prejudice and racism, or my gossip and slander is like yeast in the dough, it is like cancer in the body.

Sin spreads. Sin infects. If we aren't quick to confess it and repent of it, it can fester and grow.

So the instruction we are given us this, **James 5:16**, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”*

Perhaps there is sin today that you haven't confessed.
Perhaps there is a hidden battle you have yet to repent of.

John Owen famously says, “be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

So the Law teaches us that sin is universal, sin separates us from God, and sin spreads...

4. Sins vary in severity.

(20 MINUTES)

As we said, this chapter is divided up into four sections:

When the High-Priest sins, when the congregation sins, when a leader sins, and when a commoner sins. But each process is different. When a commoner or leader sinned, a regular priest could receive the sacrifice, and the priest would take the blood and put it on the horns of the altar.

But when the entire congregation or the high priest sinned, the process was different.

Look at **vs. 5-6**, *“⁵ And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting, ⁶ 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.”*

When the high-priest sinned there was an added step: the high priest would kill the animal, and would take some of the blood, enter into the tabernacle, and sprinkle it before the veil of the Holy of Holies. This is done seven times, seven being the number of completion, representing full atonement of sin.

We see this also when the congregation sins. In that situation, the elders come forward with the sacrifice and offer it to God. The high-priest then does the same as with his own sin.

Why? Why this added step for the high-priest and the congregations sin?

When the high priest was guilty, when the congregation was guilty - a deeper cleansing, a deeper atoning was needed. The blood had to be taken deeper into the Tabernacle, right up to the ground where the veil of the holy of holies was.

Listen to what Andrew Bonar says on this,

“The personal holiness of the priest is provided for by this consideration, that if he were guilty of some mistake in the service, or polluted some of the holy vessels, his sin would injure thousands of souls. It might misrepresent the way of acceptance to thousands, and thereby ruin their souls. It left the sanctuary-door open to Satan.”³

When the high-priest was guilty, his sin could lead to the pollution of the entire sacrificial system. His sin could lead to the deaths of thousands or more. When the entire congregation sinned, it was the elders who were at fault. It was a poor reflection on their leadership, and they inherited the blame.

The damage caused by these sins was far greater and far more reaching.

This is not just an OT thing. In the NT, the spiritual leaders of the church are held to higher standards, and are held to a higher account before God.

The brother of our Lord says this in **James 3:1**, *“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”*

If the Gospel that a Pastor or Elder preaches is marred, if the sins of that man corrupt His message, like the High-Priest, he not only corrupts it for himself but he corrupts it for all those under his influence.

Paul will tell Timothy in **1 Tim. 4:12**, *“Set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”* Pastors and elders are supposed to be lessons of godliness to their people!

The reason that they will be judged more harshly is that people look to their pastors and elders as examples in everything!

We are illustrations of what it means to follow Christ.

Robert Murray Mc’Cheyne says this,

“A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.”⁴

(25 MINUTES)

Either we will be a weapon in the hand of God, or God will turn His hand against us.

³ Bonar, 67.

⁴ –Robert Murray M’Cheyne, as quoted in Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1875-94/2008), 2.

We don't want to be an example of corruption and God's judgement – we want to be an example of purity, holiness, and Christ-likeness.

This is why Paul says in **1 Tim. 4:16**, *“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save **both** yourself and your hearers.”*

When the shepherd sleeps, the flock is in danger.

This should do two things:

It should make pastors and elders tremble before God, who is fiercely defensive of His flock.

It should drive us to prayer, to repentance, to holiness, to accountability and transparency. We ought to take this warning serious – if we drift from the Gospel, if we preach legalism, if we hinder anyone from coming to Jesus by our example, speech, conduct or message, WOE to us!

But it should also drive you, the congregation, to pray for your pastors and elders.

Hold us up in prayer. Watch out for us. Call us on flagrant sin or flagrant hypocrisy.

Pray that we would know nothing other than Christ, flee worldly temptation, and shepherd faithfully – lest we bring destruction upon you and ourselves.

So the Law teaches us that sin is universal, sins separates us from God, sin spreads, that sins vary in severity...

5. Sin demands death.

We see over and over throughout Lev 4 that the offerer would come before the priest, and they would have kill an animal to be atoned for their sins. If the high-priest sinned, a bull. If the congregation, a bull. If a leader, a goat. If a commoner, a female goat, or a female lamb, or if you were poorer, you could bring two turtledoves or two pigeons.

The point is this – if you sinned, something had to die.

Perhaps as we have read through **Leviticus 4**, you have been hit by the question, “Why did God require all of these sacrifices? Why does God require blood and bulls and goats to atone for sin?”

In **Genesis 2:16-17**, we see why these sacrifices were needed.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

Adam & Eve ushered sin into the world, and when sin entered the world so did death. So when sin occurred, death sprung ready.

Paul will tell us in **Romans 6:23** that *“the wages of sin is death...”*
Sin brings death. The penalty of sin is death.

So death marked the experience of the average Israelite. Every time a sacrifice was made, they would return home with blood on their robe, under their fingernails.

Remember, our text today only deals with sins committed accidentally or unintentionally.

A key thing in this idea of unintentional sins - sin is sin whether you know about it or not.

Your ignorance of sin does not save you from guilt.

This text shows us that God defines sin. Not you.

Some of us think WE define sin.

We think, “I don’t agree that act or behaviour is not sin,” or “I don’t think that’s wrong.”

It doesn’t matter. You are still guilty, because God defines sin.

And the wages of sin is death.

(30 MINUTES)

So death was constantly present in Ancient Israel.

Listen to what **Leviticus 6:12-13** says, *“The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out... Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.”*

Day and night, the fires of the altar needed to be fueled.

The fires that were needed to satisfy the wrath of God for sin were never quenched because the sins of God’s people were never ending.

The sacrifices continued to add up as the sins of God’s people grew.

Rivers of blood. Plumes of smoke. Mountains of carcasses.

It was a constant reminder that we are sinners and God is Holy, and sin demands death.

But sin does not have the last word.

This is the final elementary lesson we learn about sin.

6. Sin does not have the final word.

What the Law of God showed was that God demanded death for our sin – and in His grace God says, “But not your death.”

We are the guilty ones. We are the ones who committed the sin.

We are the ones who stirred the wrath of God against us by lying, cheating, lusting, stealing, being impure – and yet it was not our blood being shed.

Where sin should have cost my blood, my death, my life - it was not my body being burnt outside of the camp.

It was not our blood being placed on the horns of the altar.

There is a key verse in Leviticus that shows us the solution for sin. **Leviticus 17:11** tells us, *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”*

Do you hear that? Do you hear the good news in that verse?

The solution to sin is not OUR sacrifice.
It is not OUR good works. It is not OUR moral purity.
It is not YOUR attempts to make yourself holy before God.

The solution is **GOD’S gift**.
GOD has GIVEN US the solution.
GOD has provided the atonement.

Do you see how it’s not what WE do?
It’s easy to get that impression. Look at all the offerings. Look at all the sacrifices.
But the only thing we bring to the altar is SIN – GOD brings atonement.

GOD brings atonement. GOD offers forgiveness.

And thanks be to God we know now fully what the Law only hinted at.
Thanks be to God we know now what the Law adumbrated or foreshadowed.

God has now provided a PERFECT sacrifice for sins, a perfect atoning sin offering.

Jesus Christ, God’s perfectly obedient and sinless Son, God Himself in human form, became a human sin offering for us. He paid the debt of sin, He shed His blood as a sacrifice for sins.

Hebrews 9 says this, *“¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”*

Do you hear that Cornerstone?

In one single sacrifice, Christ atoned for the sins of all His people.
Where the sacrifices and the work of the high-priest in the OT never ended, in one single act Jesus atoned for every sin.

Once for all.

No more fires. No more blood. No more mountains of gore and carcasses.
 Jesus is the perfect and effectual great high-priest!
 He has accomplished what the Law only hinted towards.

On the cross, Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice for sins that atoned for every sin for those who trust in Him.

Cornerstone, let me ask you this morning – whose sacrifice are you looking to?

Do you offer sacrifices still – a sacrifice of bible reading and prayer to find favor in the eyes of your God? Do you atone for sins through good works, prayers and year-round bible reading plans?

Or do you trust that Jesus atoned for your sins once-for-all?
 Are you worshipping at the never-ending fires of sacrifice?
 Or do you worship at the feet of the risen Lamb of God, who has taken away the sins of the world?
 Do you believe in what the Law pointed to?
 Do you trust in the lessons of the Law?

The ELEMENTAL truth we learn from the Law is that sin has a solution – and it's not a sacrifice we make but rather a sacrifice God provides - the solution to our sin is the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.

Therefore...as **Hebrews 13:15** says...*"...let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."*

It is in HIS name, our perfect high-priest, that we are saved.
 It is HIS blood that purifies us from sin.
 It is HIS death that purchases our redemption.

There is a final word, and it's not "sin" – the final word is, "It is finished." Let's pray.

BENEDICTION

Jesus is our Living Hope. Sin is destructive, but Christ is greater.
 His word to You this morning is, "Come to me. Repent."
 It doesn't matter how great the sin, it doesn't matter the length of your rebellion, if you come with repentance and humility Jesus will receive you.

If you want prayer, if you have been moved, I will be here at the front.
 Here this benediction as we go: **1 Thess. 5:23-24**. Amen. Please take a seat before we elave.