

## Sacrifice and Satisfaction | The Gospel in Leviticus

### God and Neighbor (Repentance)

Leviticus 6.1-7; 2 Corinthians 7.8-12

9.18.16

*Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion, <sup>3</sup> or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do; <sup>4</sup> then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found, <sup>5</sup> or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering. <sup>6</sup> "Then he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering, <sup>7</sup> and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt."*

*2nd Corinthians 7.8 For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it-- for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while-- <sup>9</sup> I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. <sup>10</sup> For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. <sup>11</sup> For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. <sup>12</sup> So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.*

We're looking at the Book of Leviticus... It is a kind of manual for public worship...written about 1500 BC It's a book of laws...about moral and ritual purity.

We've looked at the themes of holiness | in The Book of Leviticus and last week the theme of sin... and today the theme of repentance...restoration of sin and its effects...restitution...fixing what's broken.

Repentance is one of those words that you really can't even say in our present environment because it sound so judgmental and antiquated...like wild-eyed, scary guys standing outside of Grand Central Station with a bullhorn in one-hand and a big sign in the other.

WHAT IF... however...there's something critically important in this word, "repent" and not only important but essential...necessary to the health and the relational hygiene of a society, of organizations and churches...of families, of marriages, friendships and even of individuals. What IF our relational and even our psychological/emotional health depend on it?

The Law ...the Torah of God given to the Israelites in the wilderness drew attention to the need for repentance, restoration of broken relationships, reconciliation and repair when wrongs were inflicted and suffered... There's a posture to be taken toward one's companions/associates (v. 2) and neighbors ...and even toward strangers and outsiders ...and toward God...to acknowledge wrongs and to repent.

And AS we'll see...while the Law could prescribe and command this repair of broken relationships ...the Law couldn't motivate it...couldn't empower it...or even ensure a good outcome...FOR THAT to happen, an outside power would be required...and that's our concern today: 1) The Necessity of Repentance 2) The Inadequacy of LEGAL Repentance 3) The Redemptive Beauty of Gospel-Repentance.

The Israelites were getting to know God and they were getting to know one another...they were a loose federation of tribes...once enslaved together now becoming a nation...They'd be relating to one another, transacting business with one another...and that involves trust... fiduciary relationships... giving and receiving promises... "Cross my heart; hope to die; stick a needle in my eye" (Did you ever say that?)

And vows...trusts...promises...agreements...sworn statements can all be broken... laws were made to be broken. So, God's law for His holy people, being utterly realistic about their tendencies to break laws ALSO provides for remedy – "when a person swears (presumably using God's name) and deceives his companion" i.e. fails to make GOOD on the vow OR any other breach of trust (notice, "or" 8x). When there is guilt...acknowledged...there will be restitution in full... plus 20 percent to the person wronged ... AND there is also a spiritual aspect of this wrong... God is involved and that also has to be recognized... a ram will be offered and the priest will make atonement...forgiveness before God.

And there will be more of this...this relational hygiene for God's wandering children AND for the future when they eventually settle...ways to protect their dealings and relationships and resolve conflict as neighbors and "companions" (v.2).

Now as utterly necessary as it is (this law of restitution and repentance) – there HAS to be a mechanism for conflict resolution and recognizing human-to-human guilt and facing that God is involved...IT HAS to be offered... BUT the law doesn't guarantee that a person's heart is IN the process. It's formulaic.

It's necessary... there has to be compensation for wrongs... and it's not just a trite little patch...it's costly...it involves death (a ram dies... there's blood) and a big penalty... BUT just like you can pay a bill or a traffic ticket or your taxes and your HEART IS JUST NOT IN IT ...at ALL...SO, this legal prescription for repentance/compensation can only take them so far.

It's why St. Paul would later write, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh" (Romans 8.3)

We all know what it is when a child is told, "Alright! Now give your brother a hug and say 'I'm sorry'" and the hug is sort of rough...sort of inflicted on the wronged sibling who receives it with a big "Ouch!"

Or one of my favorite illustrations of this... and I've used it before but bear with me if I read it:

A contemptuous husband has received some advice to change his ways toward his wife. Instead of criticizing her, he is to give his wife flowers every day for a week. The implication is that as he does this, his heart will change. He will become a better person and his marriage will improve. The husband will readily agree to this plan. ... he wants the easy way out, "Give me something to do, so I don't have to repent." Anyone can do sacrifices. We suspect that this husband would only become worse. He would just incorporate his "doing" into his life of disobedience and would become more proud. This husband is still in "god-mode"... "I have a right to judge". When challenged about his life, he now replies to his wife, "Look at all I've been doing for you." If this wife had a choice, what do you think she'd prefer: flowers or a repentant heart; roses or humility? When I consider my own heart, I will think of every excuse in the book before I will repent before my wife. I would rather spend a month's salary on gifts than humble myself. (Gospel Transformation (2006) World Harvest Mission [www.serge.org])

See the Law was good...it told the people that to misuse the name of God and to misuse and exploit and defraud our neighbor is very serious...it will cost you DEARLY... but it really couldn't stop a liar and a cheat from getting caught and then...having to return the full amount he stole ... and then saying, "AND HERE! Take your stupid 20% surcharge and I hope you choke on it!"

And THIS...as the roses illustration shows: THIS is so often how we react when we get caught and when we have to face it. It feels so unnatural and so painful to look at how I have wronged this person...we would rather do anything than to really face our wrongness in the offense.

Give me something to DO...I'll buy roses...diamonds... I'll crawl across glass or hot coals... just don't make me really have to feel what the offended person felt ... don't make me face my contempt...my meanness ...my anger ...my neglect and dishonesty...TO FACE IT FEELS LIKE DEATH...feels like a crucifixion.

I would rather give a ram and an extra 1/5 of what I damaged. I'd rather fulfill a law than to say to my companion, "I know I hurt you...could you tell me how that made you feel?" Ouch! I'd rather buy roses!

It's interesting that in this section the wronged person is called one's "companion" (Heb "amith"). There are a number of distinctions in the Law about relating to different classes of people. Are they strangers and outsiders? Are they Israelites? Are they neighbors? (Remember the lawyer asked Jesus Christ, "And who is my neighbor?" [Luke 10.29] and Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan).

The Hebrew word here (amith) is only used in Leviticus... AND one other place in the Hebrew Bible. In the Prophet Zechariah "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate (amith)," Declares the LORD of hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered...' (13.7)

See that's a prophecy about God's "amith" – God's Associate... the Shepherd who would be struck and the sheep scattered.... It's a prophecy quoted in the Four Gospels (Mt 26.31) about when Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd was betrayed by a friend...He was defrauded by Judas...and there was even a kind of restitution attempt...a kind of legal repentance...

And yet God's Associate was the defrauded Companion who was NOT restored...was not rescued and recompensed... "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion, or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do"

Turns out Jesus Christ is THE Companion (the "amith") who was lied to, treated unfaithfully extorted... and betrayed and DIDN'T THEY FIND WITNESSES to swear against Him and accuse Him falsely in regard to any one of the things a man may do"? ... And YET through this betrayal... WE are restored... the sheep were scattered only to be gathered again and gathered from all the nations...and rescued by the Friend that stays closer than a brother (Proverbs 18.24). He is denied justice in order to restore US!

If we get this...if we receive the gift of our Great Companion...God, the Father's, Associate, the Shepherd struck down for the sheep...IF WE RECEIVE THIS GIFT...if I trust that He was taking the fall for ME... then I am on my way to a new a different kind of repentance that goes beyond what the Law could command and beyond what he Law could produce.

Paul saw it in those early Christian Churches... like in Corinth when a scandal rocked that Church and they didn't know what to do. It was a sexual perversion and they tried to meet it with grace... but they were really only excusing the sin... and Paul told them, "This isn't grace and love...it's laziness and fear... please tell these two people to STOP IT..."

And that congregation was stung by the Apostle's astute observation... and yet...they also had deep assurance that God, in Jesus Christ, God in the form of the Companion (amith) had paid their price and God's heart was now their heart...they wanted what God wanted. This wasn't for them just a legal checklist to click off... this was a longing in them.

They saw their own lack of love...and they earnestly wanted to make amends and get restoration...the Law was written on their hearts. His Commandments ("His Commandments, His Commandments, His Commandments") "then become their happy choice" – by grace, through repentance they WANTED what God wanted.

St. Augustine's famous prayer, "Lord, give what You command and command what You will." (Confessions 10, 40) In other words, God who gave His Associate...His Son to be defrauded for us... we now share His heart of reconciliation... We admit our wrong...our cowardice and disregard ...our fear of being labeled busy-bodies or judgmental...

They went to that couple who had lost their way and lovingly convinced them to stop what they were doing... and Paul says, "This is more than just meeting a requirement...this is the freedom to look at your faults and face them...and feel the offence and come out with your hands up..."

"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."

There's no blame-shifting...no half-hearted excuses ...and no wallowing in some over-blown drama... they have the will of God on their hearts...and the deep security that God has embraced them by Jesus Christ. And out of an experience with the mercy of God in Christ they are trusting God to produce a new obedience in them.

Paul had just written to these Corinthians in the previous chapter: "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (5.17-19)

We have a lot of wrong ideas about repentance. In the Gospel, repentance is a gift. It's God impressing His heart deeper into ours. And it leads to beauty and redemption and change... If we really get the gospel we'll welcome repentance... It turns the shame that feels like crucifixion into a deeper sense of assurance and peace... It leads to joy and other people even find it attractive...it helps people to see what Jesus Christ is really about...and it speaks in a way that laws, rules and words can't speak.