

Leviticus: Elementary

The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, ² “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them (Leviticus 1:1-2 ESV)

And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (Leviticus 9:24 ESV)

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. (Leviticus 19:1-2 ESV)

What does the Law teach us about sin?

June 27, 2021

Leviticus 4:1-31

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 4 This morning we are continuing our series in the book of Leviticus called *Elementary*. Last week we began by looking at what the Law teaches us about God.

We saw that He is holier and better than we could ever imagine. Christians need to glory in these two truths far more than we do. Because this is who God is. He hasn't changed one bit and never will. He's the all glorious, Holy God who has saved His people and made a way that they could dwell with Him.

And this morning we going to learn another elementary lesson. We are going to learn what the Law teaches us about sin.

We are going to dive into Leviticus 4 to see this lesson fleshed out. Now this chapter deals with the *sin offering*. This was the offering that faithful Israelites offered when they had realized they had committed sin. They realized what they had done, felt the guilt and then brought an offering to atone for it.

And I think it is important to note that they were ALREADY part of God's people when they offered these.

They were already in covenant with God. That's what we saw when we looked at the burnt offering last

week! But God was demonstrating to His people that they were still going to encounter sin in the community. And when did, they were going to need an offering to deal with those sins.

Do you remember these words from 1 John?

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9 ESV)

John was reminding the Church that *ongoing* confession and repentance is necessary in the Christian's life. Though we are DECLARED righteous in the sight of God, we know all too well that we still battle ongoing sin. That's where the sin offering comes in. It was there to accommodate for our weakness.

But what is interesting, is that God in His goodness was also teaching His people that sin doesn't just affect the sinner. It affects those *around* them. Sin spreads. In this particular offering we learn that sin polluted the whole people of God. Gordon J. Wenham puts it this way:

The purification offering dealt with the pollution caused by sin. If sin polluted the land, it defiled particularly the house where God dwelt...Finally over the period of a year the sins of the nation could accumulate to such an extent that they polluted even the holy holies, where God dwelt.¹

Sin is serious business and it must be dealt with. It can't be left alone as it will stink, fester and ultimately ruin the people of God. With these things in mind, hear now from the Holy, inspired and awesome Word of God:

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

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (W. B Eerdmans Publishing Co.1979), 96.

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. (Leviticus 4:1-12 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now as already mentioned, God prescribed this offering to deal with the ongoing sin of the people of Israel. They were in relationship with a holy God and therefore needed a way to deal with the sins that they were bound to commit.

So what did this offering look like? Well last week we looked at the burnt offering and saw that it was an offering that atoned for sin by propitiating God's wrath. It brought the sinner into relationship with God. The worshipper brought the live animal and confessed why they were sacrificing it, and they killed the animal. The priest then took the blood and splashed it against the alter, and all of the animal was burned. Leviticus 1:9 says this brought about a pleasing aroma to God. God was pleased with the offering and accepted the sinner.

Now the sin offering differed from the burnt offering only after the animal was slain. The critical difference lay in what the priest had to do with the blood of the animal. The worshipper's status in the community dictated what the priest did with the blood. God was teaching important lessons to His people Israel through these different offerings.

Our main task today is to see what this Old Testament ordinance teaches us about sin.

What Does the Law Teach us About Sin?

First off, it teaches us that:

1. Sin Separates

Sin separates us from God. It creates a barrier or a chasm between us and our Holy God.

That's why this offering was given to the people Israel. They were still dealing with the same problem that Adam and Eve had back in the garden of Eden! Do you remember how God drove Adam and Eve out of the paradise that was Eden and then He blocked the way back in with the Cherubim and a flaming sword?

After they had given into sin they were as it were coated with sin. It's like when you peel off a sticker and some of the glue remains. They would be forever outside of the presence of God. Because God is pure and cannot be around that which is impure. So when the freshly rescued Israelites sinned, their relationship was fractured. Sin brought separation between God and them. That's what the Law teaches about sin. It separates God from humans.

So God gave this offering to deal with those sins that the Jews were bound to commit as they wandered in the desert. And did you notice the word *unintentionally*? Isn't that an odd thing to put in there? One commentator helpfully comments on this:

Sinning unintentionally could involve two possible scenarios. In the first, sinners are aware of a law, but unaware of breaking it. For example, Israelites might not realize that they were ritually impure, and eat fellowship offering meat. A modern parallel would be 'overlooking signs and so unwittingly driving the wrong way down a one-way street.' In the second scenario, sinners are not aware of the law to begin with. **In either scenario, however, they are held responsible.** In order to atone for their wrong, sinners must bring a purification offering.²

Isn't that a helpful summary? Sin is serious business and creates separation between God and man. Whether a white lie, the seemingly harmless gossip, or the bad attitude. He hates it all! God is holy and those thoughts and acts, whether major or minor in our eyes create a separation between us and God.

But God demonstrates His gracious mercy in providing a sacrifice to cover it. His desire is to dwell amongst us which is why He provided this offering. Thanks be to God!

Secondly, the Law teaches us that:

2. Sin Leads to Death

² R.K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1980) E-Version.

To see this look with me again at our text:

⁴ He (the Priest) 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. (Leviticus 4:4-7 ESV)

After the priest realized that he had sinned, he was to bring a bull and offer it as a sacrifice for his sins. Blood had to be spilled and sprinkled on the veil in the sanctuary in order to atone for the sin that separated God and His people. In other words, blood had to be taken deep into the Tabernacle because sin is serious.

Sin not only separates us from God but actually *attracts* His wrath. And the bull that was sacrificed bore that wrath. His life was taken instead of the priest's because SIN KILLS.

Friends, dwelling with a Holy God is scary business. And when God's people sinned, they brought an infestation of impurity upon God's dwelling place. If an offering was not given they were liable to bear their judgement, which was *death*. One commentator says it like this:

The tabernacle was indeed God's dwelling place among his people (Exod. 29:43-46). It had to be kept pure from sin, if God was to remain there and if the people were not to experience God's wrath instead of his mercy. To have God dwelling in your midst is both a great blessing and a great danger. The danger, of course, springs from man's sinfulness, **which always arouses God's wrath**.³

That's a scary yet necessary truth for us to realize as it was for the people of God wandering the desert. They were rescued from the Egyptians. And now they were in the desert with this awesome holy God. They saw the Tabernacle and knew THAT'S where the God who destroyed Pharaoh dwells. And THAT'S a God who hates sin. THAT'S a God who will pour out His wrath upon sin and sinners. God's people needed to understand this FULLY as do we. God doesn't just *dislike* sin, He hates it. And it draws out His wrath.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (W. B Eerdmans Publishing Co.1979), 95.

And friends that is a *good* thing. It is good that God hates that which is opposed to Him. In our sinful natures we may dislike this, but it is GOOD that God hates the sins you and I committed and will commit. Because God has perfect knowledge and He knows that lust unchecked and deceit uninhibited and pride unconfessed are like wrecking balls that crash through His good creation. Why does God hate sin? Because He is GOOD! Because He is Holy! Because He is LIGHT! Because He is LIFE! A God who doesn't hate sin is a God who isn't worthy of praise.

But our God is good. He is holy. And He hates everything that would lead to our death.

Thirdly, the Law teaches us that:

3. Sin Spreads

Sin is like a contagious disease. It is like COVID or the measles or leprosy. This sin offering demonstrated this. In verses 2-3 we read:

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. (Leviticus 4:2-3 ESV)

In this case, when the priest sinned, he brought sin upon the WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD. His sin didn't simply remain with himself but was as it were smeared on the people. Gordon Wenham comments on these verses:

When the priest sinned he involved not only himself but **the whole nation**. Here we have the idea that one man's action can affect the whole nation.⁴

This truth that sin spreads is fleshed out in the Laws pertaining to leprosy. This term leprosy covered an array of skin diseases that an ancient Israelite could have suffered from. In Leviticus 13 there were given multiple steps in discovering whether someone would be considered 'unclean' because of a skin disease. It wasn't that they were sinners *because* of the disease, but the disease was emblematic of sin and impurity. When someone had contracted a skin disease they were considered unclean and had to go onto mourning. They were banished to outside the camp where the sinner and impure had to be. God would not risk having

⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (W. B Eerdmans Publishing Co.1979), 97.

the disease spread to the rest of the camp. It was an object lesson showing the holiness of God versus the awful and corrosive spreading of sin.

One writer calls living with leprosy in Israel a 'living death.' Just like Adam and Eve, the leprous person was put outside from the presence of God and the people of God so that the disease would not spread in the camp. Sin never stands still. It needs to be stopped and contained and killed. It needs to be put out once and for all.

We all know this. How gossip ruins friendships. How lusting at a computer screen ends marriages. How a parents anger leads to a child growing up and perpetuating that same anger.

This simple yet all important lesson is one we can never forget: sin spreads in the people of God. God wanted his freshly rescued people to learn this fast. Sin can't be toyed with. It separates, brings death, and spreads like wildfire.

And fourthly, the Law teaches us that:

4. Not all Sins are Created Equal

All sin damns us before God, but some sins are more consequential than others. We know this from watching the news. Murder, adultery, trafficking, these sins have greater effects than others. Do you remember how I mentioned that the rites of the sin offering differed depending on who had sinned? The high priest had to bring in the costliest animal when he sinned, followed by the spiritual leaders of the people, followed by other leaders, and followed lastly by a member of the congregation.

The point is that not all sins are created equal. All sin damns us before God, but not all sins have the same consequences. You can recover from porn-adultery will destroy your marriage and family.

Or think about the man in 2 Corinthians who was sleeping with his mother in law. That was a sin that had SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES. Not only for those involved. But it affected the whole people of God in Corinth. They FELT the affects of that gross sin. Their witness suffered big time!

But lots of sins aren't as consequential as adultery or murder. You and I are going to be lazy, sometimes unreliable and forget to do the things that we said we would. Those are all bad and need to be repented of. BUT we all understand that if we catch these quickly and repent, the effects can be mitigated. As we as a loving family need to learn to distinguish between these. We need to be *quick* to overlook petty and insignificant wrongs done to us. In other words, leave room for your brothers and sisters to sometimes step on your toes by accident. Does that make sense? Some sins are more serious than others.

And the sins of leaders are *particularly* serious. God demonstrated this by prescribing the most expensive sacrifice when a leader sinned. Leadership is important and when leaders fall the consequences are much more dire. Not all sins are created equal.

Do you remember when King David chose to take a census of the people of Israel? He wanted to get a grasp on all the mighty people he had under his command. Do you remember what happened? 1

Chronicles tells us this:

But God was displeased with this thing, and he struck Israel. And David said to God, 'I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing.' (1 Chronicles 21:7-8b ESV)

Then God responded with this judgement:

The LORD sent a pestilence on Israel, and **70,000** men of Israel fell. (1 Chronicles 21:14 ESV)

David's arrogance and complacency brought about the death of 70 000 people! When leaders sin, the affects are greater. Good leadership is a wonderful gift but we all know when it fails people are devastated. From homes to businesses, and especially in the Church. Sin destroys and crushes from the top down.

How many Christians, young and old, have had their faith shaken with the news of Ravi Zacharias? A man who was greatly admired by both Christians and atheists. And now what? He has become just another arrow that the world can shoot at the Church. It rocked the Church. And it rocked some of you. And we learned the important lesson all over again: when leader's don't take sin seriously, the consequences are dire. The people of Israel learned this well as they saw the costlier animal being sacrificed when their leaders sinned. As they saw the blood going further into the tabernacle.

And this lesson is for us today. We need to take leadership in every aspect of our lives seriously. In our homes we have to be godly parents who teach, model, both in our words and actions what it means to follow God. Who train their children to love righteousness and hate sin. Who teach their kids the five G's of the gospel. But also parents who teach their kids to repent QUICKLY.

As we saw in our text, when the priest REALIZED HIS GUILT he brought the bull to the Tabernacle. This was supposed to be done with haste. The priest wasn't to wait two weeks and then come. No he was supposed to come quickly and make things right by the way God provided. All sins matter but the sins of leaders is particularly serious. Let's hear that warning with humility and pray for those who God has placed over us. Whether that's in our homes, our Churches, or governing bodies. The sins of our leaders hurts us the most. It's harsh, but it's true.

But I want to end where we began. Remember Christian that this sacrifice was for SAVED PEOPLE. God's people had been rescued from Egypt and now had his presence dead center in their midst. And God loved His people and knew they would stumble. So He made a way for their fractured relationship to be mended. We would miss out if we forgot this.

Do you see that? Do you see God's love for His people? Do you see His love for you?

Your sin angers God, but He has made a way for your fractured relationship to be mended. Jesus was not only the offering that paid for our former sins, but he was the offering that paid for ALL OF OUR SIN. That's why John gives these precious words:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all, unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 ESV)

Those words are not just true for the lost, but also for the Christian who has stumbled.

God is Holy. Sin is awful. But Jesus has conquered sin and its power. See the Cross, where your sin was laid on Jesus. He is the offering that God accepted on your behalf to bring you home. And He is also the offering by which your present and future sins are washed away.

So glorify Him by taking sin seriously. Don't give it an INCH. Confess it and repent QUICKLY. And then rest in the saving, all sufficient work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.