

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

Dr. George O. Wood

There's a reference to the sin offering in Leviticus 6. The primary reference is Leviticus 4:1–5:13. Rather than simply reading all of this body of Scripture what I'd like to do is sort of set the stage by reading some selected verses. Then as we go through the message today in this series on Leviticus we'll have reason to deal more on the content of the chapter.

First, in 4:1–3, the Lord said to Moses “When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands—if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed” (NIV). He continues in verses 13–14, “If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden of any of the LORD’s commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, they are guilty. When they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting” (NIV). Verses 22–23, “When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of the LORD his God, he is guilty. When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect” (NIV). Verses 27–28, “If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands, he is guilty. When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect” (NIV).

The only difficulty I had in entitling today’s message is that the title should have something to do with the offering that is described in Leviticus 4 and it’s commonly called the “sin offering.” But sin as we normally think of it is different from what the sin offering was all about. We think of sin as telling a deliberate lie for example. Or committing a wrongful sexual act. Or defrauding someone. Or stealing some money or some property. Or killing someone. Or maybe disobeying

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

your parents. Yet the sin offering described in Leviticus 4 would have nothing to do with any of those circumstances that I just described. What therefore was the sin offering for?

I. The sin offering basically had three purposes in mind.

A. The first purpose for the sin offering had to do with unintentional sins. Our sins of omission. This is the primary purpose of the sin offering. As you look in the verses I've just read you will find that there are four areas covered in the life of the society of Israel in the committing of sins of omission or unintentional sins. There was the sin of the high priest. Then there was the unintentional sin of the whole community. Say, the whole community does something wrong and later it becomes known to them that what they did was wrong. Then it is to be dealt with.

Then the third category was in the event the leader did something wrong. He was to admit it.

There is a pattern in Leviticus of what can happen when a leader sins unintentionally and the action is later proven to be wrong. They deal with it. They lay it aside. Confess it.

Then there was the ordinary person who would commit a sin of omission or unintentional sin. In fact in chapter 5, verses 1–4 you have described four different categories of unintentional sin on the part of the ordinary person who would commit a sin of omission or unintentional sin. They were as follows:

If you were in a situation where you should say something and you were silent. Often we think of lying as telling something. Scripture sometimes will take the vantage point that if you should speak in a situation and you are silent that is wrong also. If for example you had evidence in a court case and you withheld it then that was a sin of omission.

But also there were second and third categories that had to do with ceremonial uncleanness—contact with animal and human uncleanness.

Then there was a fourth area of a sin of commission in verse 4 of speaking up when you should be silent. That is taking an oath and not really performing the oath.

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

This sin offering is literally the miss-the-mark offering. In the Hebrew the word for sin simply means “to miss the mark.” It carries the idea of a person who doesn’t come up to the complete goal and design that the Lord has for them. If it’s a case of an unintentional sin or a sin of omission then there was an offering provided for it.

It’s interesting as you look at the Old Testament you’ll find a second category of sin for which there was no offering allowed. This is called the sins of the “high hand.” That term is from the King James Bible. If you look in the modern translation, the NIV, Numbers 15 you will see especially in verses 22–31 a distinction made between sins of omission and sins of the high hand or sins of defiance. A sin of defiance would be something that you start out doing knowing clearly as you start it that it is wrong and you’re going to do it anyway. It can include everything from murder to adultery to breaking the Sabbath. All sins of the high hand were nonforgivable sins. There was no offering in the whole Levitical system to cover sins of the high hand or defiance sins. Numbers puts it well in 15:30–31 “If anyone sins defiantly or sins with the high hand whether native-born or alien, he blasphemes the LORD; that person must be cut off from his people because he has despised the LORD’s word and broken his commands. That person must surely be cut off. His guilt remains on him.” Remember when David sinned with Bathsheba and caused Uriah to be murdered. He realizes that in the sacrificial system there is no sacrifice that can cure his sins. No wonder he comes to God in Psalm 51 and says, “Have mercy upon me O God according to your unfailing love.” It was not “according to your sacrificial system,” but “according to Your unfailing love.” “You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart God will not despise.”

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

This forgiveness of unintentional sin—but not forgiving of defiant sin—developed in Israel a sense of a need for identification, a more adequate sacrifice that no Levitical law could offer.

Blood that could cleanse not only from *some* sin but from *all* sin.

It's intriguing when you read Peter in Acts 3 preaching. To the assembly in the temple that he says this about the death of Christ. He says "You and your rulers put Him to death in ignorance."

Ignorance was the term used for unintentional sins. And Peter's working with this terminology out of Leviticus and Numbers—saying that the death of Christ, which was a sin of the high hand, a defiant sin, a premeditated sin, the people who did it were evil in heart and crucified him. Yet Peter is saying God is willing to treat the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as an unintentional sin and call it a sin of ignorance, so great and vast is the mercy of God!

The sin offering had to do with this kind of thing, forgiving unintentional sin.

B. The sin offering had to do secondly with the return of the person to a normal situation. There are several instances where we would describe the person being in an "abnormal" situation. The biblical word would be "unclean." We would call it abnormal. For example a person would have a skin disease like leprosy. When they were cured of that they would offer the sin offering of Leviticus 14. Jesus told in Luke 5 the leper who had been cleansed to go and show himself to the priests and that meant offering the sin offering. When a man was cured of a bodily discharge of some kind, Leviticus 15, then he offered the sin offering. Return to the normalcy of before he had the discharge. A new mother after childbirth, forty days if it were a boy, eighty days if it was a girl, would offer the sin offering, thereby indicating that the whole time of pregnancy and child delivery was over and she was returning to her normal place in society. Mary, the mother of the Lord, offered an offering forty days after His birth. Then we have a Nazirite, someone who took upon himself a vow of not cutting his hair and stuff like that. After his time of separation was complete he was then also to offer a sin offering. He would then be returning to normal society.

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

Each one of these situations involves persons who had been in isolation from the normal life of the community now entering back into the community.

C. The third kind of sin offering had to do with purification of holy places. This is a little bit difficult concept for us to get a hold of in our society.

Scripture has this sense that our uncleanness, our sin can not only affect us as persons but it can effect the places where we are. The status this particular person might have in society would determine the degree of which there might be a contamination. In the Old Testament in the Tent of Meeting there was this thought that God was communicating with His people—His presence indwells His people and His presence is in the center of their encampment. There inside that boundary of the Tent of Meeting God peculiarly dwells. Sure, He is everywhere, yet He is especially there in the Tent of Meeting, meeting people to forgive their sins, and His presence is especially powerful within the Holy of Holies where the ark of the covenant is.

As you look at this offering what you find happening is if an ordinary person sinned, the blood from that offering was simply put on the horns of the altar of burnt offering. If it was a leader who sinned, a political leader, same place for the blood. If it was, however, a priest, the high priest, or the whole community that sinned, some of the blood of the sacrifice was taken and sprinkled on the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Seven times on the veil. Then some was also put on the little altar of incense that was in the Holy Place. Finally, once a year on the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sin offering for the whole people was taken right past the curtain and some was put on the very ark of the covenant itself, on the gold seat that had angel-like wings over the ark of the covenant.

The idea of this is that God's people, when they sin, have an impact on the place where they worship. Therefore there is the sense that when they sin the place needs cleansing. For the ordinary person, only the altar of burnt offering needs to be a witness that the cleansing is taking

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

place. But for a more important person like a high priest in the very Holy of Holies, once a year for the high priest for his own sin and the sin of all the people there is a cleansing, a purification of the sanctuary.

This is not something we ordinarily do.

II. How do we apply the sin offering for today?

A. First, Jesus is our victim and vicar. A vicar is an agent. Jesus brings His own blood into the sanctuary and offers it on our behalf. An agent is one who does something vicariously for someone else. Christ is both the offering that was killed for sin and yet He is the one who takes the offering. He is the victim and the vicar. Hebrews tells us that He himself once and for all time went in to the holy place, to the sanctuary not made with hands, but the sanctuary in heaven and appeared there with His own blood on our behalf and cleansed us from all sin, once and one time only.

In the sin offering in the Old Testament, if you commit an unintentional sin as an ordinary person you might bring it again and again various times in your life. The high priest would have to bring the sin offering into the Holy of Holies once a year, on the Day of Atonement. But Christ entered into the holy presence of God of which the earthly thing was just a symbol and there once presented His blood on our behalf to cleanse us from our sin. He therefore has provided for us a permanent redemption.

The sin offering in the Old Testament was the only offering in which blood was brought into the Holy of Holies. We know when Hebrews refers to Him bringing His own blood for our behalf that we're referring to the sin offering. He is the victim. Isaiah 53 says "The Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all." The only way we can successfully deal with the sin problem is to lay our hands upon Jesus and transfer to Him the sin and the uncleanness that is in us and let Him bear it for us. That's why God has given us the Old Testament and these sacrifices to help us

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

understand that there is a literal transference going on when come to the Lord and we visualize putting our hands on Him, the Lamb of God, our sin being transferred to Him. He then takes His own blood which is a symbol of the fact that death is required for sin. He takes His own blood and presents it to God on our behalf and we're cleansed. He is our victim and our vicar.

B. Another thing that certainly is being applied in the sin offering is that God holds the leader even more accountable than others. In Leviticus 4 when the high priest sinned he had to bring a bull for an offering and the blood was put on the veil. The political leader only had to bring a male goat and the blood was applied on the horns of the altar of burnt offering. And the citizen brought a female goat. Each animal decreasing in value. If he didn't have a female goat the ordinary citizen could bring a female lamb or two pigeons or even two quarts of flour, signifying no matter what, God has a provision for the person. He wants to forgive our sin.

Jesus said in Luke 12, "From everyone who has been given much, much shall be demanded, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much shall be asked." James says in chapter 3, "We who teach shall be judged more strictly."

As believers we must keep away from two extremes in respect to spiritual leaders and the subject of sin. One extreme is the toleration of willful sin. God holds leadership accountable to a greater degree than other persons. There should be in the Christian community no toleration of willful sin.

But the other extreme is the idea that the Christian leader is perfect and cannot make mistakes and does not make mistakes. That's not true either.

Real problems begin to occur in any spiritual community where the religious leader adopts the position that he or she is incapable of error. It's expected on occasion that the leader will fail. But a way is provided for him to undergo cleansing.

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

C. A third application for the sin offering is that unintentional sin is still sin. If later we become aware that what we omitted to do or what we did that we shouldn't have done, if we become aware of it then indeed it is sin. The Spirit convicts us, then we're to do something about it.

We're not to let that condition go on.

I preached through the Book of Leviticus ten years ago. I remember how it affected me last time.

I was dealing with unintentional sin and saying to the Lord as I was preparing the message that week, "What do you want to apply to my life in this." I said this casually. The Lord said something like this, "In the church you pastor you don't have a vision for missions, do you?" I hadn't pushed people to be involved in missions, yet the standing order of the gospel is go into all the world. I had kind of ignored that. I felt the Spirit saying to me, "Put some emphasis on missions and ask people to commit themselves financially and in prayer to support missions." At the time I was convicted of the sin of omission of missionary emphasis from Leviticus 4.

One of the things the Lord showed me again in this passage, one of the things that affects every local church is the withholding of time commitments from the work. Too many Christians have gone into premature retirement. If the Holy Spirit is dealing with you about the allocation of your time and resources to the body of the Lord this is something of vital need.

There is a balance between true guilt and false guilt of course. Sometimes we get so overly wrought up with a tender conscience that we can't be effective. We're all the time confessing the latest thing we didn't do. Preachers can really dump guilt on people. There's a guilt that's dumped from a human sense, and a real conviction that the Holy Spirit can bring. If you're looking at sins of omission, open your heart to see what the Spirit may be saying to you.

D. A fourth application of the sin offering is when we sin we may still be God's children. But we do not experience or enjoy his presence until we deal with the sin. That's the reason for the sin

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

offering in Leviticus. We must deal with the sin in order to have true restoration of our presence before God.

E. Finally, when we let Christ be our sin offering, we know the joy of being restored. The Old Testament saint would offer the sin offering more than once. Many times in his lifetime. We have found in Christ that He has only been offered up once for us. Yet we need to lay hands upon Him again and again. As 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” We find in our Christian experience there are times we fall short of the glory go God. We need to come back and renew and restore the relationship and let Christ again be our sin offering.

Looking at this whole theme of “I Need to be Restored,” what this offering does is when we successfully deal with the sin in our life by placing it upon Christ and by being renewed, we are restored. We’re brought back to the place in God where we need to be.

Let the Spirit ask you these questions:

Is there anything in your life by way of sin that is there unintentionally? That is there by way of omission? Maybe something that is there by way of intention? The Lord brings you into Himself in this moment of worship and says, “I want you to deal with that. Lay it aside. I want you to be restored to Me.”

Are you ending a non-normal time in your life and returning to normalcy? There are some persons here today who have had a very abnormal period of time in their life—maybe weeks or months. Maybe you’ve been like the leper, sort of isolated and separated. The Lord has brought you here today and told you the winter is past, the spring has come. Today let this be the celebration of the fact that a non-normal period in your life is over and God is restoring normalcy.

I NEED TO BE RESTORED

Leviticus 4:1–5:13, 6:24–30

Thirdly, look at any places in your life that have become polluted, in which the Lord might want you to bring a sense of His purifying power. **Is there any place in your life God is calling you to purify? Is there any situation in your life the Lord is calling you to purify?**

When we answer those questions and have the Spirit illumine our minds we have the key to what the sin offering is.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, we thank You for these moments again with Your Word today. Your Word is healing to us. It opens up windows in our lives that we would not have otherwise. We think of these questions which have just been raised. As each of us examines our own heart, show us what areas we need to be concerned with. Speak, Lord, to our hearts. Let us deal with intentional or unintentional sins in this moment by saying, “Lord I realize where I’ve been wrong. I pray Lord that You will correct me now. I offer my life up anew to You that it might be totally and unreservedly given to You.” “I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that you represent your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12). We do that Lord now. We present our bodies as a sacrifice to You. Receive the individual acts of commitment we make in this time. Restore us to Your presence. Thank You, Lord. Amen.