

At the beginning of each sermon in our series so far
I have highlighted the opening line of the book.
How the LORD called to Moses from the tent of meeting.

“And he called” is actually the Hebrew name of the book.
“Vayikra.”

At the end of the book of Exodus,
Moses had erected the tabernacle as the place where God would meet with his people.

But then the glory of the LORD has filled the tabernacle.
And when the glory of the LORD fills the tabernacle –
no one – not even Moses – is able to enter.

How can man meet with God?
How can Israel dwell in the presence of a holy God?

But God has called!
Whom has he called to draw near?
Just Moses?
No.
Just the priests?
No.

Look back at chapter 1, verse 2 –
“When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD...”
The same theme was repeated in chapter 2, verse 1 –
“When anyone brings a grain offering...”

And now, in chapter 4 – “If anyone sins unintentionally...”

God’s call comes to *you!*

If you don’t read Leviticus in the light of Christ
you won’t understand Leviticus correctly.

The converse is also true.
If you don’t read Christ in the light of Leviticus,
then you won’t really understand Christ correctly!

I know for myself – when I saw the ascension offering more clearly,
it helped me to see Jesus more clearly!

Our modern way of thinking starts with the ethical question –
“what should I do? How should I live?”

Leviticus – God’s call from the tabernacle –
says that if you would ascend the hill of the LORD,
and enter into his most holy place,
then it is only by these offerings that you may come to him!

The ascension offering – ascending to God through death.
Ephraim Radner points out that in the grain offering and the peace offering
Cain and Abel are reconciled.
Cain brought grain – Abel brought an animal.

But the offerings of Israel included both.
Why?

Because when God came in the flesh, he *did not say*,
“get your life in order, and then I will accept you.”
He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father
except through me.”

I like how Radner says it:

“That he *is* our peace means that he does not bring to us a peace that exists apart
from...him.... He is our peace, because coming as he does he actually reconciles Cain and Abel.
It is not as if the two now become pacified, a smoldering anger quenched, like Jacob and Esau
(Gen 33). Such pacification is but the shadow of true reconciliation, though it passes for such in
a world where difference is seen as radically ingrained in creation. Christ is our peace because
the two become one, the ‘one new man in place of the two, so making peace (Eph 2:15).
(Radner, 53)

Last time we looked at the burnt offering, the grain offering and the peace offering.
These were the foundational offerings in the OT sacrificial system.

The burnt offering – or “ascension offering” –
was the foundation of the whole sacrificial system.
It is called the “ascension” offering because the whole animal is burnt –
and thus, the whole animal “ascends” up to God in smoke.

God alone consumed the burnt offering by fire,
signifying that God alone can deal with sin.

God and the priest consumed the grain offering,

signifying that we need a mediator who will bring peace with God.
And God and the worshiper consumed the peace offering,
signifying the peace that comes through the sacrifice.

We also saw that Leviticus does not go into detail regarding the meaning of these sacrifices.

They were well known throughout the ancient world,
and so there was no need to explain their meaning or significance.

But the sin offering and the guilt offering were different.

These are unique in the ancient world.

And for a good reason.

The burnt offering, grain offering and peace offering
were to be brought to God voluntarily.

The sin and guilt offerings were mandatory.

If you committed certain sins, you had to bring these offerings.

This reminded Israel that it is not enough for the priests to offer sacrifices daily.

If you have sinned, **you** need to deal with it.

Let us look at how God told Israel to deal with sin.

First, the sin offering.

The sin offering was to be brought when you unintentionally broke God's law.
Flagrant, willful rebellion resulted in the person being cut off (Numbers 15:30),
which often meant "executed."

But not all sin is considered willful.

God's law is an objective standard.

It is possible to sin without even realizing it.

The sin offering was designed to deal with those sins committed by accident.

These are the sins that we catch ourselves afterwards and say,
"how could I have done that!?"

Deuteronomy 19:4-5 gives the example of someone whose axe head flies off
and kills someone.

Is he guilty of murder?

No – because there was no intent.

Other examples from scripture include:

One who has come in contact with a dead body (Numbers 19:11-22),
one who is recovering from certain sexual discharges (Lev. 15:13-15, 28-30),
one who is recovering from a skin disease (Lev. 14:2-32),
or when a woman is recovering from childbirth (Lev 12).

Likewise, sin offerings were to be brought for the consecration of priests (Lev 8; Ex 29)
or the consecration of the altar (Lev 8; Ex 29).

In such cases, the sinner would bring a ‘purification’ offering.

Unlike the burnt, grain or peace offerings,

the sin offering also varies depending upon the person who sinned.

While all sin deserves death,

there are several aggravations which can result in a more severe penalty.

Our Larger Catechism asks Q151: What are those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others?

It answers: Sins receive their aggravations,

1. From the persons offending: if they be of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others.

2. From the parties offended: if immediately against God, his attributes, and worship; against Christ, and his grace; the Holy Spirit, his witness, and workings; against superiors, men of eminency, and such as we stand especially related and engaged unto; against any of the saints, particularly weak brethren, the souls of them, or any other, and the common good of all or many.

3. From the nature and quality of the offense: if it be against the express letter of the law, break many commandments, contain in it many sins: if not only conceived in the heart, but breaks forth in words and actions, scandalize others, and admit of no reparation: if against means, mercies, judgments, light of nature, conviction of conscience, public or private admonition, censures of the church, civil punishments; and our prayers, purposes, promises, vows, covenants, and engagements to God or men: if done deliberately, wilfully, presumptuously, impudently, boastingly, maliciously, frequently, obstinately, with delight, continuance, or relapsing after repentance.

4. From circumstances of time and place: if on the Lord's day, or other times of divine worship; or immediately before or after these, or other helps to prevent or remedy such miscarriages: if in public, or in the presence of others, who are thereby likely to be provoked or defiled.

These principles reflect the teaching of Leviticus (and the whole of Scripture)

on how different sorts of people may need to bring different sin offerings.

Leviticus 4 sets forth four different cases of how the sin offering should be conducted depending upon the station in life of the person sinning.

1. Sin Offerings for Unintentional Sins (4:1-5:13)

a. For the Priest (v3-12)

b. For the Whole Congregation (v13-21)

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally^[a] 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.

¹³ “If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally^[b] and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt,^[c] ¹⁴ when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering and bring it in front of the tent of meeting. ¹⁵ And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be killed before the LORD. ¹⁶ Then the anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting, ¹⁷ and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD in front of the veil. ¹⁸ And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD, and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ¹⁹ And all its fat he shall take from it and burn on the altar. ²⁰ Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. ²¹ And he shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it up as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.

First, it deals with the transgression of the priest. (4:3-12),

and second with the whole community (4:13-21).

These are so similar that we can deal with them together.

As the priest goes, so go the people.

He is the representative of Israel,

who enters the Holy of Holies once every year,

bearing the sin of the people upon his breast.

If he is not holy,

then the whole community is not holy.

Therefore the ritual for the priest and for the whole community are nearly identical.

The priest lays his hand on the head of a bull

(or in the case of the whole community's sin,
the elders of the congregation lay their hands on its head),
thereby spiritually transferring the sin to the bull.

He slaughters the bull,

sprinkles the blood of the bull seven times before the Holy of Holies,
and on the horns of the altar of incense in the tent of meeting.

This was the closest the priest could get to the Most Holy Place,
except on the Day of Atonement.

The blood was sprinkled there as a sign that the whole community had been defiled,
and needed to be cleansed (notice in verse 17 that this is done
when the whole community had sinned.)

The fat of the bull was then burned on the altar of burnt offering,
and then, unlike any of the other offerings,
the carcass of the bull was taken outside the camp and burned.

This is what the priest deserved.

He should have executed outside the camp

(All executions were to be performed outside the camp,
so that the camp would not be defiled by death).

But the animal is taking his sin upon itself,

and so must receive the same penalty that the sinner deserved.

This is why Hebrews 13 says that our Lord was crucified "outside the camp."

He was the sin offering that cleanses the community from sin.

c. For a Leader (v22-26)

²² "When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, ²³ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish, ²⁴ and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering. ²⁵ Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering. ²⁶ And all its fat he shall burn on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

d. For the Common People (v27-35)

²⁷ "If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, ²⁸ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. 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. ³¹ And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

³² “If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish ³³ and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering. ³⁴ Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering 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. ³⁵ And all its fat he shall remove as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the LORD's food offerings. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

The third instance is a “leader”—a chieftain or elder of Israel. (4:22-26),
and the fourth is of a common person (4:27-35)

The leader must bring a male goat,
while the commoner brings a female goat.
The more important the sinner, the bigger the offering.

But also notice how the ritual differs for these two.

There is no mention of sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice before the veil.
And there is no mention of burning the carcass outside the camp.

The sin offering for the priest and for the people involved averting the judgment of God upon the whole nation.

The sin offering for the leader or commoner is strictly an individual matter.

Therefore it is sufficient for the priest
to put some blood on the horns of the altar of burnt offering;
and it would appear that the meat of the sin offering for the leader or commoner
would be eaten by the priest.

Notice that in all of these instances (except the priest),
the conclusion of the offering includes a declaration of pardon:
“So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin,
and he shall be forgiven.” (4:20, 26, 31)

This is why we have a declaration of pardon every Sunday morning.

God promises that those who trust in the sacrifice,
will indeed be forgiven.

But in these sacrifices, Israel is learning that sin **must** be dealt with.
You cannot simply ignore it and hope that the regular sacrifices will take care of it.

Sin and impurity must be removed.

In 5:1-13 we hear further details about the sin offering.

First we hear of several additional cases that require a sin offering.

It is not only for unintentional sins,

but also for sins of negligence.

e. Special Cases: Failure to Testify, Accidental Uncleanness, or Rash Oaths (5:1-13)

5 “If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity; ² or if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean wild animal or a carcass of unclean livestock or a carcass of unclean swarming things, and it is hidden from him and he has become unclean, and he realizes his guilt; ³ or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort the uncleanness may be with which one becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and realizes his guilt; ⁴ or if anyone utters with his lips a rash oath to do evil or to do good, any sort of rash oath that people swear, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and he realizes his guilt in any of these; ⁵ when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed, ⁶ he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation^[d] for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.

5:1—when someone failed to speak when there was a public charge;

This probably refers to a legal setting
when someone hears a witness giving false testimony.
If you hear someone bearing false witness, and do not speak,
you must bring a sin offering.

5:2-3--when someone was unaware of touching something unclean
(Leviticus speaks of a sin offering after childbirth (chapter 12),
after infectious skin diseases (14), or unclean discharges (15),
and Numb. 6:11 requires one after the accidental violation of Nazirite vow.

5:4—when someone takes a rash vow—one that he either could not or would not keep.

Verses 5-13 then give extra details on the ritual of the sin offering.

The first point is that the sinner had to confess his sin.
He could not merely bring the offering,
he had to confess.

This is why we have a public confession of sin every Sunday morning.
The reformers understood that sin must be dealt with publicly.

Our public confessions are rather general.
They are not intended to cover every individual sin.

This is why James urges us to “confess your sins to one another.” (James 5:16)

Just as the OT saint would confess his sins to the priest,
so also we, if we believe in the priesthood of all believers,
should confess our sins to one another.

All of you are qualified by God to hear each other’s confessions.

But sin offerings were expensive.

If you were a careless Israelite, these could add up pretty quickly.

And unlike the burnt/grain/peace offerings,
these might have to be brought several times a year.

And what about the poor?

The poor could bring a pair of pigeons or doves,
and if he could not even afford a pair of doves,
he could bring a tenth of an ephah of fine flour (about two quarts).

It was not to be confused with the grain offering (hence it had no oil or incense),
it was in fact a sin offering.

This should cause us to note that the removal of sin did *not* always require blood.

Heb 9:22 says that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

This refers to the *ordinary* process commanded by God.

But this is the one exception.

For the very poor, God would forgive their sins even without a blood sacrifice.

⁷ “But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed two turtledoves or two pigeons,^[e] one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. ⁸ He shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin offering. He shall wring its head from its neck but shall not sever it completely, ⁹ and he shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, while the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar; it is a sin offering. ¹⁰ Then he shall offer the second for a burnt offering according to the rule. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

¹¹ “But if he cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, then he shall bring as his offering for the sin that he has committed a tenth of an ephah^[f] of fine flour for a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it and shall put no frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. ¹² And he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take a handful of it as its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, on the LORD's food offerings; it is a sin offering. ¹³ Thus the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed in any one of these things, and he shall be forgiven. And the remainder^[g] shall be for the priest, as in the grain offering.”

2. Guilt Offerings (5:14-6:7)

a. For Unintentional Sins Regarding the Holy Things (5:14-16)

The last offering is the guilt offering.

This also has to do with “unintentional” sins,
but these have to do specifically with the Lord’s Holy Things,
and with your neighbors things.

And the first thing to note is that the liturgical penalty
for sacrilege and for theft was the same.

Stealing from God and stealing from your neighbor are equivalent.

This is all the more striking considering the gradations given to the sin offering.

But upon further reflection it makes sense.

God called Israel his son, his firstborn.

To steal from the Son of God is the same as stealing from God.
The sin offering makes distinctions based on the sinner,
not on the person who was sinned against.

¹⁴ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁵ “If anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD, he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation, a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued^[h] in silver shekels,^[i] according to the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering. ¹⁶ He shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest. And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven.

First, 5:14-19 deal with sacrilege.

What happens to those who commits a “breach of faith” with respect to the holy things?
What are the holy things?

This refers to the various sacrifices.

The showbread in the holy place was one of these.

Of course, it is not very likely that anyone was going to sin
“unintentionally” in that matter.

More likely would be sins against the tithe, the firstfruits, and other offerings
that might accidentally get mixed up with the regular food supply.

b. For Unintentional Sins Regarding Commandments (5:17-19)

¹⁷ “If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity. ¹⁸ He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him for the mistake that he made unintentionally, and he shall be forgiven. ¹⁹ It is a guilt offering; he has indeed incurred guilt before^[l] the LORD.”

c. For Breach of Faith in Economic Matters (6:1-7)

⁶ ^[k] The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor ³ or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby— ⁴ if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found ⁵ or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt. ⁶ And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering. ⁷ And the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty.”

Then 6:1-7 deals with a “breach of faith” against the LORD through defrauding your neighbor.

Whether through deception, oppression, robbery, or even finding something that was lost
and then lying about it to keep it,

in any of these cases the penalty was the same as if you had stolen from God.

You must bring a ram for a guilt offering,
and you must restore that which you stole, plus an additional 20%.
Those of you who are familiar with OT criminal law may wonder at this.
The restitution required in Exodus 22 is double the amount that was stolen.
But this is not the criminal penalty; this is the liturgical penalty.
Indeed, it appears that if you repented of your sin
and brought the guilt offering to the priest,
and restored that which you stole,
then you would not be subject to the civil penalty.
This provided incentive for turning yourself in before you got caught!

What is the point of all this?

We often think of sin as something *willful*.
We often think that if it was an accident, then it wasn't a sin.
But sin – as our catechism puts it so well –
is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

Any time that we are not loving the LORD our God with all our heart –
we are sinning.

Any time that we are not loving our neighbor as ourselves –
that is sin.

My unintentional sins far outnumber my intentional sins.
That's part of what God is teaching his people in Leviticus 4-5.
The other part of what God is doing in Leviticus 4-5
is showing us that Christ came to deal with those unintentional sins!

Paul, in Romans 8, says this:

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and **as a sin offering** [the ESV says “and for sin” – but it's the term used for the sin offering], he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

When you see Christ as the *sin offering*
you realize that he has paid for all those unintentional sins.
If you had to keep track of all your unintentional sins –
all the omissions of what you should have done! –
it would be exhausting!

But Paul points another way:

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus^[d] from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So because Christ is the *sin offering*,

Practice repentance and forgiveness in your homes, and with one another.

Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!

He is the sin offering, and the guilt offering,

by whose blood we are cleansed.