

The Offerings Of Leviticus (Part Seven): The Sin And Trespass Offerings

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For thousands of years, men have recognized to some extent that they are cut off from God. Perhaps some have not understood why, but Isaiah 59:1-2 makes the reason clear: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear." Sin separates us from God, and sin must somehow be overcome if access to Him is to be made available.

In Ephesians 2:11-13, the apostle Paul makes abundantly clear how overcoming sin's deadly grip is accomplished:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

The blood of Jesus Christ secures forgiveness and redemption for us when we believe and bring forth fruit fitting repentance because His sacrifice is of sufficient value to cover the sins of the whole world. I John 2:2 says, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

Throughout this series of articles, we have seen two clear distinctions between the sweet-savor offerings and the sin and trespass offerings. The burnt, meal, and peace offerings were a sweet savor because no sin was represented in them. God enjoyed them because of the devotion of the offerer they represented. The sin and trespass offerings, though requiring unblemished animals to be offered, representing the sinless Christ, were nonetheless laden with unforgiven sin. Jesus was laden with sin once He took our sins upon Himself, and the law claimed His life. God never views sin as pleasurable; they were not a sweet savor.

A second distinction is that the sin and trespass offerings were burnt outside the camp. This act emphasized God's disgust and aversion to sin and at the same time signaled the separation sin produces. The sinner, separated from God, could have no access to Him until he repented, and he was likewise separated from the community until cleansed of his trespass.

A Third Distinction

Leviticus 4 provides instructions concerning the sin offering and Leviticus 5, for the trespass offering. Are they not the same? Are not sins and trespasses the same thing? Can we see a difference between them? God does, thus there are two different offerings covering them.

Humanly, we are quite limited in making judgments because we can see clearly only what is happening on the surface of another's conduct; we have but a small degree of insight into another person's heart. Conversely, God says He looks upon the heart in His judgments of men (1 Samuel 16: 7). The fruit of our shallow perception is that we are forced to judge what a person *does* rather than what he *is*. We are willing to confess that we might do evil things but reluctant to admit that the heart, the fountain of what we do, might be inherently evil! Jeremiah 17:9 plainly says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

How can sin in the heart be covered unless there is an offering for what is in it? The distinction between the offerings of Leviticus 4 and 5 is this: The sin offering of Leviticus 4 covers our evil nature, the heart's sin. The trespass offering of Leviticus 5 atones for the fruits of that evil nature, the acts that are actually performed.

Notice how God reveals the sin offerings purpose: "If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering" (Leviticus 4:3). Notice that, though God mentions the priest, he names no specific sin. It is generalized, as if it could be any number of specific sins.

Verse 13 is similar: "Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done something against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which should not be done, and are guilty. . . ." Again, sin is dealt with broadly; no particular sin is named. The same principle holds true in verse 22, where a ruler is named but no specific sin, and in verse 27, where the common people are identified but no particular act of sin.

By contrast, the instructions for the trespass offering reveal the opposite approach: Specific sins appear but the offender is generalized. Leviticus 5:1 provides a clear example: "If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter—if he does not tell it, he bears guilt." This pattern continues: "Or if a person touches any unclean thing" (verse 2); "Or if he touches human uncleanness" (verse 3); "Or if a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lip to do evil or to do good" (verse 4). Verse 5 concludes the opening thought: "And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing."

These contrasting approaches show that the sin offering covers the sins of the evil heart, and the trespass offering atones for sins of evil behavior.

In three places in Matthew, Jesus distinguishes sin as coming in two parts for those who have made the New Covenant with Him:

Matthew 12:34: "Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." The tongue only utters what is already in the heart.

Matthew 15:17-20: "Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,

murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man." Acts of sin besides what the tongue commits proceed from the same evil heart.

Matthew 7:16-18: "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit." These verses confirm the impossibility of changing an evil heart, as it can never produce good fruit. God must completely replace it with a wholly different nature for it to produce good fruit! Before being changed, it can produce only evil fruit.

This teaching is paramount in helping us appreciate God's grace. God has covered sin, its penalty, and its expiation from every possible angle to ensure we will be in His Kingdom. He covers not only the sins we commit, but also what causes them to occur—human nature. This has far-reaching and meaningful ramifications that should lead us to ever-increasing gratitude for His vision and mercy.

Is Sin Everywhere?

No matter how thoroughly we were counseled for baptism or how vividly we were told that Christian life might prove difficult, very few are dissuaded from being baptized. This is, of course, good. However, most of us are also full of misplaced confidence. Though none of us is ever sure of what we will have to experience to be prepared for what God has in store for us in His Kingdom, we are sure God will be there for us in our times of trial. He will indeed, but will we be ready to face our discouragement over what we come to see in ourselves?

As we become educated in God's way, as we grow and become more discerning, sin becomes more apparent everywhere we look. The discouraging aspect is that the sin is not necessarily in others but that we see it in ourselves. We may even reach a level of outright despair because, everywhere we turn, every angle we view ourselves from, we see "little" deceits. We become aware of envy rising, jealousy, anger, and sometimes even rage and hatred. We attempt to bottle them up to keep them from breaking out.

Yet, they always seem to be just below the surface, ready to leap out in a foolish act. Sin is like a cancer, most of the time invisible but silently working to destroy us. Sin desires to return us to our former state. We may have even imagined that, when we began to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, life would become continually easier—we would grow in holiness, and life would become an unending pleasure. Too frequently, it seems to work in the opposite direction.

This course, however, is good. First, the older and more mature we become in the faith, the more of the filthy corruption of sin we can discern. Our discouragement can turn to thankful encouragement because, even though we perceive the filthy corruption in ourselves, our ability to discern it more clearly is evidence of growth. Second, it is encouraging to understand that for us to overcome sin and grow, we must first be aware of the corruption.

Third, it is wonderful to understand that our merciful God has covered even all this accumulated sin that we have been completely unaware of. Christ's blood is sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world! That we can see more of the evil aspects of human nature should help us also discern of the

implications of Christ's sacrifice. Fourth, these things should motivate us to cry out to God, "Your Kingdom Come! Your will be done!" and help us yearn for the time we will be free of the pulls of the flesh.

The removal of ignorance is a wonderfully rewarding gift. Even so, despair sometimes comes easily because we have allowed ourselves to be deceived into trusting our own works to keep us in good standing with God. If we fail to conduct ourselves according to our own standards, it is not difficult to become guilt-ridden and full of despair.

We should strive as Paul describes in I Corinthians 9:24-27:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

We must not merely "shadow box" as he describes but fight with our whole heart to please God and glorify Him with a proper witness before men.

However, our works do not admit us into the Father's presence and keep communication flowing. Jesus Christ's sacrifice does; the sin and trespass offerings precede us. If we could get into His presence by our works, who would need Christ? We would be sufficient to redeem and save ourselves. We need to thank God humbly for His gracious providence that enables us all along the way.

Human Nature Is Ever With Us

We saw earlier that the human heart cannot be completely changed. Supporting this is what God declares in Ezekiel 36:26, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." The meal offering adds support to this as well. The instructions show that, once leaven was put into it, it was not allowed to be burned on the altar (Leviticus 2:11; 6:17).

Leaven is a symbol of sin. Regardless of how much oil, a symbol of God's Holy Spirit, was poured on the offering, no leavened offering was allowed to be burned on the altar. This teaches us that no amount of God's Holy Spirit can repair human nature. God's Spirit will enable us to keep it suppressed, but it will not change it. Thus, we also understand that as long as we are in the flesh, human nature will be with us. We must deal with it; it is a fact of our spiritual life.

The apostle Paul vividly illustrates this for us in Romans 7:14-25:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do,

that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Paul is not confessing that he continually practiced sin in his daily life, but that the threat of practicing it was always with him. He always had to be on guard against it to keep it from breaking out. And, at times, it did indeed break out, reminding him not only of its presence, but also its strength. There is no doubt Paul was a mature Christian. Therefore, this serves as a reminder to us that, no matter how spiritually mature we become, human nature will still always be with us.

Paul died spiritually and was buried in the waters of baptism. Therefore, baptism and the receipt of a new nature by which we are to conduct life do not take human nature away. We, like him, sincerely desire to do the right thing. We believe God's Word. We love God and aspire to glorify Him. Nevertheless, because human nature is always present, we do not always follow through. Instead, human nature overpowers us; we are taken captive, as it were, and revert to following its drives instead. This can be very disturbing, piling guilt upon us and making us fearful of separation from God.

Thus, because we are similar to Paul, and despite the wretchedness we may feel, we have assurance, knowing we will be delivered from this peculiar situation, one that is somewhat akin to having a dual personality. Our deliverance is through Jesus Christ; there indeed is an end. However, unlike many Protestant groups that proclaim that we do not have to keep the law because all is done for us, we know that we must strive to walk even as Christ walked—and He never sinned. I John 2:3-6 emphatically states:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Though we are under no condemnation, we still must do our utmost to yield to the Spirit of God to our utmost abilities. We are to "go on to perfection" (Hebrews 6:1), endeavoring to grow "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Paul says, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Despite the difficulties involved, any failures that occur, and any feelings of guilt that arise, we are still required to strive to keep God's laws as Jesus did.

Is Everybody Included?

Is it possible that some might be excused from the sacrifices required or that some may have escaped the infections of human nature? Again, God's teaching in the instructions for the trespass offering tells us, "No." Within Leviticus 4, the high priest, the whole congregation, the ruler, and the common

people are all directly mentioned. Human nature is everywhere; it infects every stratum of society. From top to bottom or bottom to top, regardless of one's perspective, sin is everywhere. Nobody escapes from it.

Whether one sins individually or in a group by going along with a crowd, one still incurs guilt. The degree of guilt and the effects may vary, but sin is still present. The sacrifice's directives make an instructive distinction between the offerings made for the sin of the high priest and the sin of the whole congregation in contrast to what was required for the sin of a ruler or commoner. Leviticus 4:5-7 states:

Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it to the tabernacle of meeting. The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of meeting; and he shall pour the remaining blood of the bull at the base of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Verses 16-18 give the same instructions for sin of the entire congregation.

The sacrifice was killed outside the Tabernacle. After its blood was poured into a basin, the high priest took it inside the Tabernacle and smeared a small amount on the horns of the incense altar. This altar stood at the back of the first room, called the Holy Place, against the veil that separated the Holy Place from the second room, the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies represented God's throne room.

Now notice Leviticus 4:25 regarding the sacrifice of the sin offering for a ruler: "The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering." Verse 30 repeats this command in regard to the sin offering of the common people.

Comparing the two offerings reveals a clear distinction between them. Each offering indicates the relative seriousness of the sins that motivated the offering. What the high priest does affects everybody in the nation. When he sins, communication with God is completely shut off. Therefore, the incense altar is part of the ceremony, as it represents communication with God through prayer. Thus, the blood of the offering must ceremonially cleanse the incense altar. The same principle is true when the whole nation sins. Because everybody is sinning, and sin separates one from God, the blood of the sin offering must heal the breach in the same manner as when the high priest sinned.

When a private individual sinned, whether civil leader or commoner, his sin affected only himself and those immediately involved. Thus, they were free to carry out their services to God in other areas. The high priest, though he too was an individual, was more critical to God's means of communicating with His people. When he sinned, the consequences were far more serious.

Under the ceremonial system, the brazen altar represents earth and the incense altar, heaven. The blood represents the means to accomplish the reunion of God and man.

Ceremony and Grace

Leviticus 5:15-16 adds still another development to understanding the offerings:

If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of the Lord, then he shall bring to the Lord as his trespass offering a ram without blemish from the flocks, with your valuation in shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary, as a trespass offering. And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done in regard to the holy thing, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.

Whenever a sin caused loss to the one sinned against, restitution had to be made to him for his loss according to a valuation made by the priest. An additional one-fifth was added to the evaluation to compensate the plaintiff for any costs involved in recovering his loss. This process contains a valuable spiritual lesson.

Suppose a person stole something from another worth a hundred dollars. He would then appear before the priest with his offering (a ram without blemish), as well as a hundred dollars. However, an additional twenty more dollars would go to the victim to cover any mental anguish or attorney's or private detective's fees. This is what would have happened physically. However, we should consider this spiritually because this principle has application to us today. We are similarly under His government.

When we break His law, we are indebted to Him. The penalty of breaking His law is death. If we pay the penalty, we die, ending our indebtedness, but it also ends our potential, stops our growth, and perhaps—God forbid—keeps us from entering God's Kingdom. That would be the total end of everything! However, upon repentance, God permits us to claim the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sin. He allows the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to substitute for us.

However, in doing so, He now has a claim on us He did not have before we made use of Christ's sacrifice (symbolically, the unblemished ram). Before, He had a claim only on our obedience, but now He also has a claim on our life because He has spared us the death penalty. God not only forgives our sin, but He also clears us of guilt and then gives us the wherewithal to keep His law in the future. God adds grace, that is, gifts, as this is generally what "grace" means.

In Romans 5:20, Paul puts it this way: "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." When God forgives our sins at the beginning of our conversion, He does not simply wipe sins away. He also invites us into communion with Him, gives us His Spirit to enable obedience, promises to provide all our needs, and adds everlasting life on top of all this! In other words, God sets the example of going above and beyond what is merely required of Him.

God expects us to follow His example in our relationships with each other. The twenty percent payment over and above what was literally owed represents the way we are to act toward men in general. In answer to the disciples' request to increase their faith, Jesus clearly instructs them to go above and beyond what was required:

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." . . . [Jesus answered,] "Does [a master] thank [his] servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" (Luke 17:5, 9-10)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins His ministry espousing this very principle:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. And if any man wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (Matthew 5:38-42)

He crowns his teaching on this principle in verses 43-44: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." He says we must be quick to forgive. He did that very thing hanging on the stake in behalf of the very ones who were killing Him! That is going above and beyond even in the midst of great personal pain and stress when one would most likely have his mind focused on himself. At the very least, we should have a mind to extend grace even before our enemies want it.

In concluding instructions on loving our enemies, Jesus makes an arresting statement on the attitude and conduct by which His disciples are to live:

And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much aback. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. (Luke 6:34-38)

Even as God lives by grace, we too are to learn to implement it into our lives. If we want to super-abound, we must learn to give grace. We are to go above and beyond mere requirement because it will support developing the mind of God.

In Corinth, members were taking each other to law over disputes between them. Paul admonishes them:

But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! (I Corinthians 6:6-8)

They were failing to behave like God. They should have swallowed their pride and suffered loss. Christ gave up His glory and suffered the greatest loss in the history of creation!

God is not only willing to forgive but also go above and beyond and give additional gifts besides to the sinner. God shows this giving of grace in the trespass offering. It is indeed a high standard, but it is eminently worth emulating because it works to make us like the One who sets the standard.

