

Leviticus 4:1-3,22,27-31;6:2-7 4 The LORD again told Moses, ²“Tell these things to the Israelites.” When a person sins unintentionally against any of the LORD’s commands by doing something which the LORD has prohibited, this is what you must do: ³If it is the anointed priest who sins and thereby brings guilt on the people, for the sin that he has committed he shall present a young bull without blemish as a sin offering to the LORD. ²²When a tribal leader sins by unintentionally disobeying any of the commands of the LORD his God and doing something that should not be done, and he then realizes his guilt. ²⁷If any common person from the land sins by unintentionally violating any of the LORD’s commands by doing something that should not be done, and he then realizes his guilt, ²⁸or the sin that he committed has been made known to him, he shall bring a female goat without blemish as his offering for the sin that he has committed. ²⁹He shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter the sin offering at the place for the burnt offering. ³⁰Then the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar for burnt offerings. All the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. ³¹After he removes all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of the fellowship offering, the priest shall send it up in smoke on the altar as a pleasing aroma to the LORD. In this way the priest shall make atonement for him, so that he may be forgiven.

6 ²If a person sins and commits an offense against the LORD by deceiving his fellow citizen about a deposit or an investment or something stolen, or if he has extorted something from his fellow citizen, ³or if he has found something that was lost and he pretended it was his, or if he swears falsely about any offense that a person may commit in connection with any of these sins—⁴when he has sinned and then admits his guilt, he shall return what he has stolen, or what he has extorted, or the deposit which was entrusted to him, or the lost thing that he has found, ⁵or anything else about which he has sworn falsely. He shall repay it in its entirety and then add one-fifth of its value to the payment. He shall pay this to its owner when he admits his liability. ⁶Then he shall bring to the priest as his penalty to the LORD an unblemished ram from the flock (or its equivalent) as a restitution offering. ⁷The priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, so that he may be forgiven for whatever he has done to incur liability.

Sometimes you can’t just tell someone something. You have to show him. Someone could tell you how to use a certain computer program or phone app until they were blue in the face, and you probably wouldn’t understand nearly as well as if you were sitting right in front of the screen, pushing the buttons yourself. You can learn a lot about driving a car from classroom lectures, but you won’t really understand until you get behind the wheel. Children learn better when they have manipulatives to get a hands-on understanding. Visual aids help us catch on to things. That’s why coaches have clipboards and pens. It’s why business people use powerpoint presentations. It’s why public speakers try to throw little stories and illustrations into their speeches. It’s why teachers have whiteboards and VCR’s. And it’s why God had his people use blood sacrifices.

While it’s almost difficult to imagine God getting past PETA and OSHA and the environmental protection agency today, his requirement of animal sacrifices was actually the perfect visual aid for getting his people in Old Testament times to see the need for a Savior from sin and to understand the payment he would make. And not just them. As God has his apostle write in Romans 15:4, “**Indeed, whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we would have hope.**” Those goats and sheep and bulls; the fire of the altar; and all that blood. It was for us. Because there, **We see Jesus paying for our sins.**

Now I know that sin isn’t something people like to talk about. And the way people ignore it and talk instead about the good deep down inside each person, you could probably push the whole idea right out of your mind pretty easily. And even in some churches and religions, sin would be too negative a topic, too much of a downer, to even talk about. But even if someone could ignore it in the middle of all the evils and horrific crimes in our society, this system of sacrifice sure points it out: “everyone isn’t good deep down inside.” And here God adds, “and neither are you.” See, when

God's people 3400 years ago went to church, they couldn't miss it. Could you imagine yourself as an Israelite back then? Bringing that animal to worship. You and your family are all doing that mouth-breathing thing you do in nursing homes or when you are changing a diaper. Because all that blood – well, there's a disgusting stench to it. And the odor of death just hangs in the air. Even the thick smoke from the burning fat and animal flesh doesn't take away from that smell. And the noise of all those sheep and goats and cows and birds. But your own animal snaps you out of it as it starts to struggle. You wrestle it still, solemnly put your hand on its head, and then the priest cuts its throat. But even as you let dead weight fall to the ground, it's still not over. The man starts collecting the blood in a bowl and sprinkling it on the altar and dumping it on the ground next to the altar and cutting out chunks of the animal to throw on the fire with all the other sizzling, smoking chunks.

It had to be quite an experience. And you think kids have questions on the way home from church now. How about back then? "Daddy, what was that all about at church? Why did the man have to kill our goat? It didn't do anything wrong. How come...? Why?... Why?" And I suppose as a parent, you would have to go to God's book of the law and read: "If any common person from the land sins by unintentionally violating any of the LORD's commands by doing something that should not be done, and he then realizes his guilt." All that smell and noise and seriousness and death. It's all about SIN. Sin and consequences with no room for excuses or even extenuating circumstances. Not even, "I didn't mean to." Or, "But, it was an accident." Hey did you know that the police officers and firefighters in most agencies don't even use the word accident – at least not in their official reports. They always say 'traffic collision.' Because even though "accident" simply means it was unintentional, most people today equate that with meaning it was no one's fault, no *GUILT* involved.

Well, when it comes to God, unintentional doesn't even come close to meaning any such thing. Did you notice in our text how each person it says "sins by unintentionally violating any of the LORD's commands by doing something that should not be done, and he then realizes his guilt." Realizes Guilt. He's Guilty. In God's system of justice, there is no "innocent by reason of insanity" or 2nd degree or 3rd degree sins because intent can't be proven. It's all sin. Unintentional sin is still sin. Sin is sin is sin. And all of it makes us guilty. And that doesn't just mean how we feel. It's how God feels. He hates our sin. And not only that his Word tells us his holiness makes him have to hate the sinner too. Every sin – whether it's the way we talk bad about someone else to try to make ourselves look better, or hateful or lustful thought that just pops into our mind, or that thing we thought would be funny to say but ended up hurting someone else's feelings – whatever it is, it ruins the way God looks at us. It makes us guilty. And God hates guilty sinners. Which means something drastic has to be done. Otherwise, in holiness and justice and perfection he will have to punish each one of us. We will die separated from him and stay that way in hell forever.

And that's the point of these sin offering sacrifices. They make it obvious that sin is serious. Deathly serious. And only the death of a perfect, unblemished sacrifice can pay the penalty. So over and over and over, these people would bring that sacrificial animal, and like it says here, "slaughter it at the place for the burnt offering... the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar... the priest shall send it up in smoke on the altar... In this way the priest shall make atonement for him, so that he may be forgiven." That's how God wanted the people before the coming of Jesus to deal with their guilt. Not that killing an innocent animal could ever be enough to patch things up with God. Blood splashed on an altar and animal fat lit on fire couldn't make a holy God stop being angry about our sinfulness. But when these people used these ceremonies and sacrifices believing in the Savior that was coming, they received God's forgiveness. Because these animal sacrifices were shadows of the Son of God in human flesh whose blood really would be enough to make a holy God stop being angry. The Savior whose life offered on the cross really did take away God's wrath.

See, you and I can hear that message, “God forgives you,” and maybe it will just bounce off sometimes. But when we see Jesus in action, when we see him offering himself as the Sacrifice who deflected God’s anger away from us by taking it all on himself; when we see the very Son of God being forsaken, punished with the full force of God’s holy anger – then we see how a holy God could forgive. Then we can know for sure it was enough. No matter what guilt or sin or how many – there’s the Sacrifice that paid for all our sins. Like it says in 1 John 1:7, “the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.”

That was the point of that sin offering. And the guilt offering detailed in chapter 6, “If a person sins and commits an offense against the LORD by deceiving his ... about a deposit or an investment or something stolen, or if he has extorted something ... or if he has found something that was lost and he pretended it was his, or if he swears falsely ... in connection with any of these sins...” Now these specific sins, specific ways we miss the mark of goodness, sound a little different than those “accidental” sins before, don’t they. Here are sins where a conscious decision is made. And again, where some of them may sound kind of minor, and we’d be prone to say, “Hey, no harm, no foul,” God sees it a little differently. Where in the sin offering, he pictured sin as something that angered the holy God, in the guilt offering he pictures it as something that puts us in debt, it makes us owe something. Our sin needs to be made up for. So not only did they have to give back what they had taken wrongfully, they also had to pay back extra, 20% more. But even that didn’t erase your guilt. The last verses: ... he must bring “as his penalty to the LORD an unblemished ram from the flock as a restitution offering ... and the priest shall make atonement for him.” See, even after setting things straight with the other people, there was still the ram to bring. Because every sin is most of all, a sin against the Lord. And all of it required an expensive and time-consuming ritual.

But none of it as expensive and time-consuming as the real thing, of course. The Guilt offering the Son of God would make of his perfect life. Like it was prophesied in Isaiah 53: “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and to allow him to suffer. Because you made his life a *guilt offering*, he will see his offspring. He will prolong his days, and the LORD’s gracious plan will succeed in his hand.” Jesus’ Sacrifice of Himself not only got rid of God’s anger so we don’t have to end up in hell, it also paid all our debt before God, so we are perfectly right with him and have real life with him for now and forever. And that frees us to change our lives. And then we can bring real sacrifices to the Lord. Sure trying to make up for where we have wronged other people. But more than that, wanting to do all we do to the glory of the One who made the ultimate sacrifice for us.

Did you ever get up to the check-out counter and all of a sudden have a kind of panic attack that maybe you didn’t have enough money? Well, that never has to happen with our debt before God. Because I don’t need a bull or ram or goat. No matter what I’ve done, no matter where I’m at, I can look at the once and for all perfect Sacrifice. I can see Jesus, true and very God, spotless in holiness, taking my place in feeling God’s wrath and paying my debt.

When I was in high school, we would tell the science classes apart like this: “If it’s dead, it’s biology; if it stinks, it’s chemistry; and if it doesn’t work, it’s physics.” Well, with the subjects that really count, it’s more like this: “If you say, “Jesus died” – that’s history. If you say, “Jesus died for sinners” – that’s theology. But if you say, “Jesus died for me” – that’s salvation. So look again at those sacrifices and altar and blood. That stuff in Leviticus isn’t just a manual for the Old Testament priests. It’s a way to see something really incredible. It’s a way to see God’s anger turned away and our debt paid for good. See Jesus paying for your sins and know you are right with God. Amen.