

Acknowledge Your Sin to God [Slide 1] Leviticus 4-6

One of the things that Christians find confusing about confession is why we need to confess our sins when the penalty of our sins was covered by the death of Jesus Christ. If Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty for all our sins, which it did, then why do we need to confess our sins in order to receive God's forgiveness? Aren't we already forgiven? The reason many are confused on this issue is because while we understand that we need God's forgiveness to erase the guilt of our sin, many do not realize that we also need God's forgiveness to remove the defilement of sin which pollutes and corrupts our relationship with God and with others. Trusting in Jesus' death on the Cross removes the guilt of our sin and rescues us from God's condemnation. However, when we sin after salvation, we still need God's forgiveness to remove the defilement of our sin.

Look at 1 John 1:9 on your outline, which was written to Christians, to people already saved from God's judgment. Read. Most of us read that verse and mentally stop at "forgive us". If I just confess my sin to God he will forgive me. "That's great and he will cleanse me from all unrighteousness, whatever that means." No, the cleansing from all unrighteousness is what the forgiveness is all about. As a Christian, I don't need to hear again that I have been saved. I don't need God to say again that I am no longer under his condemnation. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:1 that there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. What I need is for God to remove the defiling effects of my current sin. My sin has made me unclean in God's sight and blocked my fellowship with him. What I need according to verse 9 is to be cleansed of all the unrighteousness that defiled or polluted me when I sinned. I confess in order to be cleansed and restored to fellowship with God.

The book of Leviticus teaches these two aspects of forgiveness by means of two sacrifices: the sin or purification offering in Leviticus 4 and the guilt offering in Leviticus chapters 5-6. I invite you to turn to Leviticus in your Bible, but I will once again summarize most of the material in these chapters in chart form.

[Slide 2] We will first cover the sin offering or the purification offering in Leviticus 4. It's called either the sin offering or the purification offering because the Hebrew word can be translated either way. You will note that according to verse 2 this offering was for sins committed unintentionally or in ignorance. There was no offering for sins committed intentionally or knowingly, what the Bible calls "sinning with a high hand." This was a limitation of the OT law. If you deliberately rebelled or sinned against God, you were out of luck. There was no sacrifice you could offer on your behalf.

[Slide 3] The sin offering specified different procedures for whoever was the guilty party. If the high priest was the guilty party he sacrificed a bull without defect. He would sprinkle some of its blood on the veil separating the holy of holies from the holy place and some on the horns of the altar of incense inside the holy place. The rest of the blood he would pour on the altar outside the holy place. He would take the fat on the entrails, the kidney and liver and burn them on the altar of sacrifice. You can see these things on the powerpoint slide. The rest of the bull carcass he would take outside the Israelite camp and burn in a ritually clean space.

When the congregation sinned and they became aware of it, the elders would bring a bull to the tabernacle, lay their hands upon its head, and kill it. The high priest would take some of its blood and sprinkle its blood on the veil, put some blood on the horns of the altar of incense, and the rest of the blood pour out on the base of the altar of sacrifice outside the holy place. Then he would burn the fat on the altar. It says in verse 20 that the priest, the High Priest, would make atonement for them and their sins would be forgiven.

If a leader sinned, he would bring a male goat without defect, lay his hand on its head and kill it. The priest would dip some of its blood on the outside altar and pour the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. The priest would burn the fat, liver and kidney on the altar as before.

If a common person sinned, then he would bring either a male or female goat without defect, lay his hand on the goat, and kill it. The blood would be dipped on the horns of the altar of sacrifice outside the holy place and the rest of the blood poured at its base. The fat would be burned on the altar. If he couldn't afford the goat, he could bring a lamb instead, a female without defect and offer it. Laying of hands on the head of the animal symbolized transferring sin from the person to the animal.

[Slide 4] What was the key idea in this offering? The key idea is that the sinner needed purification from the defiling effects of their sin. This is a concept that we don't hear too much about today, but it is the idea that sin not only pollutes us, it often pollutes others or other things around us making us and other things unclean before God. I've listed some passages from the OT where God uses the word, "defile", to explain this polluting aspect of sin. Look at Leviticus 18:24-25 on your outline. Read. Before these verses God listed some of the practices of the Canaanites which God said had defiled the land of Canaan. The land, obviously had not committed any sin, but it was defiled because of peoples' sin committed in it.

Look at Leviticus 20:3. Read. God says that child sacrifice had defiled his tabernacle and profaned his holy name. God's tabernacle was holy, yet it had become defiled by the practice of child sacrifice in the land. In Numbers 35:33-34 God says that the shedding of innocent blood pollutes or defiles the land. In Deuteronomy 21:23 God says that a corpse hanging from a tree overnight defiles the land. We're talking here about the effects of sin polluting or tainting a land or a place, and of course, it also taints the one committing the sin.

Let me give you an analogy. A waste treatment plant is dumping raw sewage into a stream. We're going to let that act represent sin. The company broke the law. They sinned. Let's say the EPA comes in and slaps a big fine on that plant, maybe sends its CEO to jail and the company has to pay the fine and the CEO spends time behind bars because they broke the law, they illegally dumped waste. They paid the penalty for their sin. Is their sin taken care of? Is the story over? No, because the stream is polluted, the effects of their sin still linger. A judge will probably order them to pay to have their mess cleaned up. Not only do they need to pay the penalty for breaking the Law, they also need to pay to have the mess cleaned up. The sin offering or the purification offering did not pay the penalty for sin, but rather paid for the purification of the sin's effects.

So, in the case of the High Priest and the whole congregation that sinned, their sin defiled even the inner tabernacle, the holy place, and so blood had to be applied to the veil that covered the Holy of Holies and to the altar of incense within the Holy Place. However the sin of one leader did not pollute the inner temple so the blood of his sacrifice was only placed on the altar outside. The same with the individual lay person. So, here is a key point to understand when it comes to the defiling nature of sin. The amount that sin defiles depends upon who commits the sin. A sin by the High Priest defiled much more than the sin of a single person. The sin of a

whole people defiles much more than the sin of a single person. How polluting a sin is depends a lot on the level of influence wielded by the person or people committing the sin. When David sinned by taking an unauthorized census, God gave him the choice of three punishments: seven years of famine on the land, 3 months of oppression from Israel's enemies, or three days of plague. His sin defiled the whole land so the whole land suffered.

Let's look at some New Testament examples of this polluting effect of sin. In 1 Corinthians chapter 5 Paul addressed a situation where a man was committing incest with his stepmother. The Corinthians may have even boasted about their broadmindedness about the situation. Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7. Paul likens tolerating sin to allowing leaven to leaven a whole lump of dough. He's describing the polluting effects of sin on the body of Christ. If you don't deal with overt sin, the whole body will become polluted. More and more people will first tolerate and then participate in the sin. You don't just need a sin forgiven, you need its effects cleansed.

Listen to this warning in Hebrews 12:15. Read. If you allow a person to become bitter and you do nothing to confront that spirit of bitterness, it will begin to affect other people and spread a spirit of bitterness among them. If someone is bitter against you, you can certainly forgive them, but you or someone still needs to confront that bitterness and eliminate it or that bitterness will infect others.

I believe that on a national level that the sin of abortion has polluted our land. Just like in the OT days we are performing child sacrifices and shedding innocent blood through abortion. The shedding of innocent blood has defiled us and we have become sick because of it. I believe that abortion has led to dehumanizing in other areas including encouraging infanticide, euthanasia, and loss of respect for people, including even the lack of civil discourse we see in our nation. It all shows a basic disrespect for those whom God created.

The reason we confess our sins to God is because we need God's forgiveness in the form of cleansing. In Leviticus 4 verses 20, 26, and 35 the priest pronounced forgiveness or cleansing once the sacrifice was completed. We need restoration of our fellowship with God. We don't need our sin paid for, Jesus did that on the cross, but we need continual cleansing. When we were saved we were sanctified, completely washed clean of all the contamination we had accumulated in our pre-Christian days. But now that we are believers in Jesus we still need regular cleaning because we still sin. We still dirty ourselves. We still need purification from the defiling effects of sin. However, we don't offer a sin offering. We only have to confess and God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. How simple is that?

We are so blessed because through Jesus we can be cleansed of all unrighteousness even for those sins that we knowingly, blatantly commit. Jesus' death is so much more powerful than that of a bull or goat. Through the sin offering, the OT saints could only be purified for accidental sins committed in ignorance. God's grace in Christ is far more expansive and powerful. We are cleansed of all unrighteousness.

[Slide 5] In Leviticus chapters 5 and 6 we have the guilt or trespass offering. This offering varied based not on who committed the sin, but based on what sin was committed. Most of them were for accidental or unintentional sins. The beginning of Leviticus 5 lists three different examples of offenses that warranted a guilt offering. If you were a witness to a crime and you failed to testify when the judge called for witnesses, and that may have happened because you were unaware of the call, then you would offer a guilt offering. If you accidentally touched something unclean such as a carcass or blood or a bodily fluid, you would offer a guilt offering.

If you made a rash vow to God you couldn't pay which usually happened when someone was drunk, then you would offer a guilt offering.

You would offer a female lamb or goat for sacrifice. If you could not afford that you would offer two turtle doves or pigeons and if you could not afford that you could offer up some fine flour for burning. The Law made it possible for anyone, no matter how much money they had, to be able to offer up something for the guilt offering.

If you accidentally touched one of God's holy things you would offer a ram without defect plus a 1/5 of the value of the holy thing. If you sinned against God's law in ignorance you also offered up a ram without defect.

Leviticus 6 lists some guilt offerings for financial sins. If you sinned in regard to a deposit placed in your safekeeping, or deceived someone so as to rob them, or extorted money, or you lied about something that was lost, then you would offer a ram without defect and pay back all you stole plus 1/5 more of its value.

[Slide 6] The guilt offering paid the penalty for the breaking of the Law. The key idea is that we need forgiveness from the guilt of our sin. This is what Jesus' death on the cross accomplished. He paid the penalty for our sin which was death. We don't need to offer any lambs, goats or rams because Jesus paid the penalty himself and hallelujah, he paid the penalty for all sins, not just accidental sins.

You can also see in these sacrifices that God makes a distinction between the inner motives behind our sins. He recognizes that there is a difference between sins that are committed accidentally, unintentionally, or even under the confusion of an addiction, versus sins that are deliberate acts of defiance against God. The latter are far worse than the former. God allowed a sacrifice for unintentional sins but not for intentional sins. God's justice takes into account the heart attitude behind a person's behavior, something that we seldom can do because we can't know the inner motives of people.

According to the New Testament, the only way to remove the guilt of your sin is through your willingness to submit to Jesus Christ and to trust him to provide your guilt offering for you. Jesus Christ died to pay the full penalty for your sin. In the OT sacrifice, the offender brought the sacrifice to the priest. He laid his hands upon the goat or lamb or ram. That act symbolized him transferring the guilt of his sin to the animal. He then killed the animal so that it died because of his sin. The person trusted that God would keep his promise to forgive him by accepting the death of the animal in his place.

That is what you must do with Jesus Christ. Now obviously, you can't physically touch Jesus, but when you submit to Jesus as your God and Savior and trust his death to pay for your sins, that is as good as placing your hands on his head. You realize Jesus died because of your sin. You trust the Heavenly Father to keep his promise to forgive you through the death of his Son.

Part of the good news of the Gospel is that the death of Jesus on the cross pays for all sins, not just the ones accidentally committed. His death pays for the smallest of sins up to the largest, most evil of all sins. It does not matter how you have rebelled against God in the past, if you are willing to turn away from your rebellion and submit to Jesus as your God and trust him to save you from God's judgment, then you will be saved. God will forgive all your sins, wash you clean of the effects of your sin, give you eternal life, and make you into a new person. We are so blessed not to be under the Old Covenant Law, but rather part of the New Covenant by means of Jesus.

[Slide 7] In summary, Jesus' death provides both the removal of your guilt and the cleansing of your life from sin's effects. Thereafter, when you sin, you need only to confess to be cleansed again.

I would like to conclude by offering you the opportunity to trust in Jesus Christ this morning. I will close with a prayer expressing faith in him. If you desire God's forgiveness and a new relationship with God, then I invite you to join me in praying this prayer. It's not the prayer that saves you, it is the decision to trust Jesus that saves you. The prayer is a way of expressing that decision. Pray.