

The Sin Offering
Leviticus 4:1-5:13, 6:24-30
Leviticus series #5
May 29, 2022

Introduction

Eugene Peterson's autobiography | Father's butcher shop...new apron every year as he got bigger...like Samuel in the tabernacle with Eli...imagination of "priests" while working

Eugene Peterson One year we had a pastor who specialized in the tabernacle, the temple, and the whole Hebrew sacrificial system. He took on the book of leviticus as his text and preached three months of sermons on it. I was immediately interested. I was an insider to exactly this sort of world: I grew up experiencing the sights and sounds of animals killed and offered up. I had spent a lot of time by now in our local slaughterhouse and often helped with the slaughter. But after a couple of Sundays of Leviticus I lost interest in what our pastor was up to. This man knew nothing about killing animals. And though we never butchered goats, the rich sensuality of Hebrew worship was reproduced daily in our workplace. It never occurred to me that the world of worship was tidy and sedate. Our pastor had it all figured out on paper, but I knew it wasn't like that at all. I couldn't help but wonder how much he knew about sin and forgiveness. He certainly knew nothing about animal sacrifices. Sacrifice was messy: blood sloshing on the floor, gutting the creatures and gathering up the entrails in buckets, skinning the animals, salting down the hides. And in the summertime, the flies—flies everywhere.

- Objection to Leviticus: bloody, gory, messy = primitive, backward
- Our culture has been so sanitized | grocery stores, hospitals, suburbia
- I would argue that the world is a bloody, gory mess, and Leviticus is more honest about the reality of our world, and more helpful on how to deal with the mess
- Big idea: The sacrifices of Leviticus are messy because sin is messy
 - Particularly the sin/purification offering
 - Messy 1) Ways of sin, 2) Effects of sin, 3) solution to sin

I. The Messy Ways of Sin

Sins of ignorance | 4:1-2, 27-35

- ² Tell the Israelites: When someone sins unintentionally against any of the LORD's commands and does anything prohibited by them—
- ²⁷ Now if any of the common people sins unintentionally by violating one of the LORD's commands, does what is prohibited, and incurs guilt, ²⁸ or if someone informs him about the sin he has committed
- Ignorance can cause a giant mess | analogy: driving wrong on 1-way street

Sins of leadership | 4:3-12, 22-26

- Both priests and leaders in general are mentioned
- ³ "If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he is to present to the LORD a young, unblemished bull as a sin offering for the sin he has committed.

- ²² “When a leader sins and unintentionally violates any of the commands of the LORD his God by doing what is prohibited, and incurs guilt, ²³ or someone informs him about the sin he has committed, he is to bring an unblemished male goat as his offering.
- Because of the place of influence, there is great potential to cause a mess

Sins of the people | 4:13-21

- ¹³ Now if the whole community of Israel errs, and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, so that they violate any of the LORD’s commands and incur guilt by doing what is prohibited, ¹⁴ then the assembly must present a young bull as a sin offering.
- Ancient world was far more collective/communal than we are
- The idea here is that the people can become a mob and cause a mess

Sins of carelessness | 5:1-13

- 5:1 Careless to stand up for what’s right | If he has seen, heard, or known about something he has witnessed, and did not respond to a public call to testify...
- 5:2-3 Careless regarding ritual impurity | touching unclean animal or dead body
- 5:4 Careless with your tongue | speak rashly in an oath

II. The Messy Effects of Sin

Mark Scarlata When thinking about the effects of sin in Leviticus, it’s important to remember that we’re not just talking about something that causes personal, spiritual death. Of course, sin does create death in our hearts, but that was not the primary way that the ancient Israelites understood sin. They conceived of sin as a force that leads the world back into a state of chaos...When sin enters the world, it’s as if [creation] order breaks down and leads humanity and creation back toward destruction. Sin was not something that merely had personal consequences. It affected the individual, the community, the land, and especially the tabernacle. This is a difficult concept for us to understand today because sin has largely become privatized in our modern world. We think that if we sin and no one knows about it, then the consequences are between us and God. If I ask for personal forgiveness in my personal prayers, that should be enough and then I can get on with life. In Leviticus, however, sin is a force that has a very real impact on those around us and on the physical world. Whether sin is intentional or unintentional, it’s not something that can be hidden away because it will ultimately have adverse effects on the whole community of faith...This is where we need to think about Israel’s understanding of the materiality of sin. The idea is that sin is pictured as a physical substance which is somehow connected to the physical and spiritual world. Sin has the potential to contaminate physical space. Consequently, if one sins we might picture a stain or blemish that somehow rests on God’s holy dwelling place. A person’s uncleanness causes God’s home to become unclean. And the more that the pictured substance of sin contaminates God’s house, the greater the possibility that he will leave because he cannot dwell in the uncleanness of sin. Though there were no literal physical stains from sin on the tabernacle, the Israelites perceived its contaminating effects and so made sacrifices to cleanse God’s holy space. Christians are used to understanding sin as a spiritual concept that affects the individual heart or soul. But imagine if your sin, even your most private thoughts, had a negative effect on your church and your church community. Imagine if every sin by those in the congregation stained the church

and somehow left it unclean. Then imagine that the sins of the community built up so much throughout the year that you feared that the Holy Spirit might be driven away.

*Objection from some: *my sin doesn't hurt anyone, it's a victimless sin. There are no effects.*

There is no "Private" Sin

1. Small grows into large | James 1:15 (desire>sin>death) Private and victimless until it isn't
 - a. School shooting: years of private hatred and animosity
 - b. Sexual abuse: years of lust and fantasy and pornography
 - c. Covering up abuse: years of sinful faking an image, lying about reality
2. Harmful to the individual | Jeremiah 7:6 ...*worship idols to your own harm...*
3. Harmful to the world | Romans 8:19-23
4. All will be revealed | Ephesians 5:11-13 ¹¹ Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. ¹³ Everything exposed by the light is made visible, ¹⁴ for what makes everything visible is light.

Note: I'm not saying that everyone who lusts will commit assault. Nor am I saying that we shouldn't pursue laws and other practical ways to restrain evil and harm. Some people will have specific callings into legislation or mental health or foster care or other kingdom work. What I am saying is this: for people of God, every one of us has a responsibility to deal with our "private" sin.

- Big idea: There is no such thing as a private sin

III. The Messy Solution to Sin: Purification Offering (blood sacrifice)

- Mandatory offering
- Hebrew ḥatta't | Of sin
- Purification offering | Expiation (perhaps an even better name)
- A messy affair

Michael Morales The slaughtering technique of slitting the throat ensured the maximal drainage of blood from the animal's body. Precisely here, in collecting and manipulating the blood, the priest's labour would begin in earnest, dashing, tossing, scattering, sprinkling, daubing or pouring out the blood, depending on the particular ceremony involved. Typically, the blood would be applied to one of the sacred objects associated with the sanctuary and God's Presence, whether the altar of ascension (smeared upon its horns, dashed against its side, poured out on its base), the altar of incense within the holy place (smearing its horns), the veil partitioning off the holy of holies (dashed against it or in its direction on the floor) or the atonement lid of the ark within the holy of holies (sprinkled upon it). The significance of the blood rite for atonement cannot be overstated.

- Dual imagery: the devastation/death brought by sin, but also the cleansing offered by God

Big idea: Blood as a cleansing agent?

- Blood stains, when blood gets on something it's not good
- Science shows that living blood cells carry away waste | Profound insight before science

Question: what is being cleansed here? Answer: the tabernacle.

Big idea: The blood cleanses the tabernacle from the sins of the people

- The people's sins cause this pollution to go everywhere
- The sacrifice is coming and saying, "I'm sorry that my sins affect this holy place"
- The purification offering provides a cleansing, a way for people to in God's presence, but it doesn't really deal with source of the mess to begin with: sin that's in the heart

A Better Purification

Hebrews 10 ¹ Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the reality itself of those things, it can never perfect the worshipers by the same sacrifices they continually offer year after year. ² Otherwise, wouldn't they have stopped being offered, since the worshipers, purified once and for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

¹¹ Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. ¹² But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.

- Jesus' death on the cross was a brutal, messy affair
- Shows us the depths of the mess we've made, shows us the depth of cleansing we have

A Better Blood

1 John 1 ⁷ If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Not Defined By the Mess

1 Corinthians 6 ⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Walking as Clean People

- Take sin seriously
- Be cleansed by Jesus
- Live in newness of life
- Walk in repentance