

The Sin-Offering

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In Lev 4 we have four varieties of sin offering:—

- Verses 3-12 describe one for the anointed priest;
- Verses 13-21, one for the whole congregation;
- Verses 22-26, one for a ruler;
- Verses 27-35, those for a common person.

Observe there is no appointment of a sacrifice for a presumptuous person. Ex 21: 14 in a special case, and Num 15: 30-31 in the widest way, forbid wilful sin on pain of death, or being utterly cut off.

But for error in ignorance, the appointed sacrifice varies with the position of the sinner.

- The ordinary Israelite is to bring a female kid or lamb.
- A ruler is to bring a male kid.
- The whole congregation, a bullock.
- The anointed priest, a bullock.

The more responsible the sinner, the more energy must be found in his substitute.

“One of the common people,” having no particular intelligence or advantages, when his sin came to his knowledge, is to bring a female kid or lamb “without blemish,” telling us, as in every case, of the Lamb of God “without blemish and without spot.”

Verse 29. He is to lay—“lean”—his hand upon its head, thus expressing his identity with his victim; it is an act which says, I and the goat are one. I am a sinner, and have forfeited my life; I bring a living thing for death instead of myself; this goat is substitute for me. Next, he kills it. Not the priest kills it. The priest’s work began when the animal was presented; he must refuse it if it were not “without blemish,” but being such, he accepts it on God’s behalf as suitable and fit. Then he stands aside for the offerer to kill it. Had it been for himself, his own offering, he would have killed it, killed it as offerer, not as priest. This was the general rule. I, the offerer, kill the goat I bring (when accepted by the priest, Mal 1: 6-8, etc.), having laid my hand upon it to declare it stands as and for myself. There seems a very pointed value to this act; it is more than owning the need of death for atonement, for it is the death of his substitute at the hand of the sinner himself. This is clearly the sinner saying—I take the place of death for myself. It expresses the sinner’s own judgment of himself. Now this is the only fitting place for a sinner to-day in the presence of God. Not only has he done wrong, but he, as a source of wrong, must be brought to judgment. This he allows and declares, by himself slaying his own substitute.

It may truly be that few have discerned this, when by God’s grace they are brought first to trust in Christ; but the sooner it is learned, the sooner will the soul find what special blessing in new creation is made his.

“In the place of the burnt offering.” Connect with this, Lev 6: 10, 11, where we find the ashes of all burnt on the brazen altar were carried outside the camp “unto a clean place;” and Lev 4: 12, where the carcase of the sin offering bullock was burnt at the same spot. Whatever

variations of detail are appointed, these two offerings were killed on one spot, and ultimately their ashes mingle outside the camp. They figure one Christ, and one and the same work of death and judgment bearing, while both are “most holy.”

Verse 30. The priest now takes the blood, and puts some on the four horns of the altar, pouring out the rest at the bottom of the altar.

A horn is the symbol of power; four is chiefly the number of completeness on earth through Scripture; it is finite perfectness, somewhat distinct from seven, which is rather infinite and heavenly. Four is more manifest, and seven mystical. Sprinkled blood on the four horns was a complete display above the heads of the people, of the blood that had made atonement for the transgression. It was a public memorial of atonement accomplished. No misgiving or doubt could arise as to this. Specially would the sinner rejoice to see it done; he would know for himself the forgiveness of his guilt, and could refer anyone to that open witness for the evidence upborne on the signs of power, that he had been cleared according to God's appointment. How satisfied and content he would return home.

The counterpart of this is plain; “for if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” The Israelite knew his sin atoned for. Why should believers on Christ be in doubt?

In Heb 10 the special witness of the Spirit is, “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” Of old there was the material witness, now it is the divine words for faith to rest upon.

There is a reference to horns on altars in Jer 17: 1, which is connected with this meaning of them; it is the solemn sentence of God upon Judah, when He is about to remove him from his inheritance. Accordingly Judah must no longer turn to the established witness of atonement on the horns, for now at last instead of blood there, his sin is graven upon them. So also in Amos 3: 14, when God will “visit the transgressions of Israel upon him” “the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.” No blood of atonement can be displayed, for the sinner is then to bear his own guilt.

But in 2Sam 22: 3, and Ps. xviii, 2, David speaks of God as “my shield, and the horn of my salvation;” the term here may be used in the simple figurative sense of power, but if it be not a direct reference to the altar, it gives force to the use of the horn attached to the altar.

The second action of the priest with the blood, is to pour out the bulk of it at the bottom of the altar. The fire is ever burning upon the altar, expressing the consuming judgment of God; it is below that, that the blood is poured. This suggests the blessed truth, that our Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life—blood— under the judgment of God. His death was not merely the surrender of life, but it was in connection with, and as subjecting Himself to, the righteous wrath of God against sin. It was there, on the cross, that God condemned sin in the flesh, and that Christ drank the cup at His Father's hand. Without shedding of blood is no remission, and remission is by His one obedience unto death, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, 1:e., the judgment of them. Only so could God's righteous claims be settled, and His grace

flow out. Now the pouring out of the blood below the altar of fire, tells this view of our Lord's work, how it settled all the demands of justice by His bearing judgment.

THEN GOD IS SATISFIED.

There is the witness for the perfect clearing of the guilty conscience, and the worshipper once purged is to have "no more conscience of sins;" and there is also the perfect clearing of the throne of God, so that He is "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." "Christ died for the ungodly," and God is He "that justifieth the ungodly," for the laying down of life upon the cross, was the suffering that made Christ perfect as the Captain of salvation as "became" God. Feebly as any one of us grasps this, limited as our powers are to measure it, yet it is true, and God has now set forth Christ "raised for our justification," as He had been "delivered for our offences."

Thus far then we see in this offering:—

- A victim without blemish—the perfect Christ.
- The offerer killing—death fully owned.
- Blood on the horns—atonement made and witnessed so that the sinner is cleared.
- Blood at the bottom of the altar—life surrendered under judgment so that government is satisfied.

All which is real in Christ to us, but solely through His work on the cross.

Yet so far it is grace working in deliverance; grace working to enrich by gifts bestowed, is still to come. Verse 31 will unfold this.

All the fat and rich growth are to be taken from the carcase and to be burnt by the priest on the altar.

It is in this verse alone that the words, "for a sweet savour,"—strictly, "a smell of delight"—are used with a sin offering. The same action is found with the other sin offerings, and it is similar to the action in Lev 3: 5, where this burning is said to be for a sweet savour, while the technical Hebrew word is the same for both, and is also that used for burning incense.

Thus from the sin offering there rises a smell of delight to God out from the fire. There was at the cross of Christ not only propitiation by blood-shedding, but the sin bearer there was such that He glorified God, honoured Him, brought a glory to His throne, and government, and nature, which was the true "smell of delight," even from that terrible place where sins, and sin, and all evil, were dealt with and their judgment executed.

This will come out more fully elsewhere, but it is significant, and blessed too, that the commonest Israelite was clearly told that his kid furnished a sweet savour to God. For he was identified with his substitute. What that substitute was to God, such also he was himself; its value was all reckoned to him, and he had not alone the atonement by its blood and forgiveness accordingly, but he had too all the worth of the smell of delight and stood accepted in it, with the blessing of his Jehovah.

The absence of these words, “sweet savour,” from the three former sin offerings in the chapter, has been at times a little severely criticised. But the anointed priest and the ruler may have well been expected to know what a common person might be ignorant of. Does it not rather express God’s care for those who have no advantages otherwise? Is it not His grace to the ignorant, the mass at large? Does it not raise a question too in our hearts—shall we preach a gospel of forgiveness only, even to the very lowest class of hearers? Shall we not tell such the riches of Divine love pardoning freely, and at the same time blessing with the fulness of Christ? In no way should we lessen the truth and absoluteness of justification, if we pressed acceptance of the person. Nay, if as instruments we felt our privilege of declaring the latter to the roughest and lowest, must not this carry home still more fully to their hearts what the righteousness of faith is in its completeness, for, otherwise, acceptance could not be?

Anyway, God would not let the truth of acceptance be lacking in the case of the lowest position in Israel. Blessed be His Name. And it rests on us, in view of the full revelation in our hands, to be content with no gospel message in the wretchedest slums civilisation produces, which does not tell God’s heart by setting out the exceeding riches of His grace, beyond mere deliverance *out from*, even to deliverance *into*. It is the striking difference between Israel freed from Pharaoh, Egypt, tasks, and bondage, and Israel put into possession of Canaan to enjoy old corn, grapes, figs, pomegranates and honey, none daring to make them afraid.

At this present time, it is grace dealing through the cross with sins, sin, enmity, and every evil, to deliver the soul from all fear and thrall, while, immeasurably more, it sets the soul “in Christ Jesus,” in new creation, in resurrection, for the enjoyment now of “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places,” being God’s own marvellous response to the infinite smell of delight which rose from Calvary, gilds His throne, rejoices Himself, then, now, and for eternity, which is inexhaustible as it is immeasurable, and produces that joy in God which is the supreme blessedness of any creature of His hand.

In the sacrifice appointed for a ruler we find this difference, that it is a male instead of a female; the greater energy herein expressed meeting the deeper responsibility found in the offerer’s position.

In the case of the whole congregation, as well as in that of the anointed priest, a bullock is appointed, the most energetic of all the animals, for responsibility in the fullest way lay upon these offerers.

The anointed priest appears to indicate all the sons, descendants of Aaron. Some have thought the anointing distinctive of Aaron or the high priest, but in view of Ex 29: 7, Lev 8: 12, and xxi, 10, as contrasted with Ex 29: 21, Lev 8: 30, it would seem that anointing by pouring oil *upon the head* was distinctive of the high priest, while all priests were anointed by sprinkling.

Before examining the several rites given with the bullock, and which are alike in these two cases, observe that in verse 3 it is said, “If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people.” In the three other cases it is said, “sin through ignorance.” Again, verses 20, 26, 31, 35, say atonement shall be made, and forgiveness is stated too. Neither of these is expressed for the anointed priest.

This suggests a special meaning to the first sacrifice and offerer, viz., that our Lord Jesus Christ may be seen here in both characters, victim and priest. For the sins laid upon Him were those “of the people,” and those exclusively. It was impossible for Him who “knew no sin,” to sin even “through ignorance.” He voluntarily took the place of sin bearer, and in the language of Ps. lxxix. 5, confesses ours as His; “my sins are not hid from thee.” Also when the work of the sacrifice is finished, no “atonement for” is mentioned, nor any “forgiveness.” He whose love led Him to take our judgment upon Himself, could not be forgiven, nor could any atonement be made for Him.

In verse 3 it is “a young bullock without blemish,” the perfectness of His person as ever, and in the full energy of life. Brought to “the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before Jehovah,” into the immediate presence of God, where He had appointed to meet the people, Ex 29: 42, 43. Only so can guilt be truly dealt with. It is against Him we have sinned; and in His presence, to Himself, sins must be confessed. Not a vague and general acknowledgment of doing or being wrong, but solemnly owning the transgression in detail, and in the light of the grace that is now revealed.

Verse 4. “Lay his hand upon the bullock’s head.” This action has been a good deal mixed up with Aaron’s act on the great day of atonement as given in Lev 16: 21. On that day both his hands were laid on the scapegoat’s head, and “*all* the iniquities,” “*all* their transgressions in *all* their sins,” were confessed and put on the goat’s head.

But nowhere else is this appointed to be done. It is the same Hebrew word for “lay” as in Deut 34: 9, where Moses laid his hands on Joshua; and as in Num 8: 10, where the Israelites laid their hands on the Levites, expressing fellowship or identity for special service in each case.

So with the offerer and his sacrifice; he not only brings the animal, presents it for acceptance by the priest, and thereby owns he has transgressed, but he also identifies himself with it, and declares by leaning his hand upon it, this bullock stands as, and for himself.

He then kills the bullock before Jehovah. The term rendered “kill” or “slay” throughout this connection is allied with the thought of shedding its blood, indicating the manner of death in its essential point.

Verse 6. The priest then takes the blood into the holy, and sprinkles some before the vail seven times. There appears to be no reference elsewhere to this action, but as it was the nearest point of ordinary approach to God for the priest, where he might hear the voice speaking to him from off the mercy seat, (Num 7: 89, Ex 25: 22), it is probable that it was for restoration of the priest to communion which his sin had interrupted.

Further, he was to put some upon the horns of the golden altar. For a ruler or common person we have seen that the sprinkling was upon the horns of the brazen altar in “holy place.” There, such an one could come and see it; here in “the holy,” the priest continually came in the course of his service; and so each offerer would find the full record of the atonement made for his guilt whenever he drew nigh. What confidence this would give. What confidence is ours, “full assurance of faith” as we draw near, aye, and abide near.

Finally, with the blood, all the rest is to be poured out “at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering.” Below, as we have seen, the fire, even as our Lord laid His life down under God’s judgment for sin.

Verses 8, 9, 10 give the burning of the fat upon the brazen altar. This was done in every sin offering, and tells the sweet savour of Christ to God, which is the measure of our acceptance by Him, Lev 17: 6.

Verses 11, 12, also verse 21, give an important variation from the ruler and common person’s sin offering. The bullock itself was burnt outside the camp. This is specially referred to in chapter 6: 30, where the law of the sin offering is found. If the blood were fully dealt with in “holy place” at the brazen altar, then the priest who had officiated was to have the carcase for his own eating; but if the blood had been taken in to “the holy,” and put on the horns of the golden altar, the carcase was not to be eaten, but burnt outside the camp. Clearly, to eat would be to assimilate to himself, which would be a contradiction if the sacrifice were for his own sin; but the priest could consume another’s offering, and in doing so would express the final removal, probably, of the guilt it had suffered for. But when the priest’s own guilt was in question, then the carcase is burnt, by a term which means to utterly destroy, outside the camp.

Much more, however, may be seen in this action. The blood shedding made propitiation for sins committed; “it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul,” Lev 17: 11, but this special action of utterly destroying the carcase, is a forcible picture of God’s dealing with the “body of sin.” We read in Rom 6: 6, “knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed” (annulled), “that henceforth we should not serve sin.” It brings before us the marked difference between what I am, and what I do. What I do may be atoned for, and forgiveness bestowed, 1:e., for sins, but sins could not be crucified. On the other hand, what I am could not be forgiven nor itself atoned for; forgiveness does not apply to a nature. “The carnal mind is enmity against God,” Rom 8: 7, and that cannot be forgiven; but it must be dealt with in some way by God, for the clearing of His creation from it (ultimately “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself,” Heb 9: 26), and also for our deliverance from its power now, until the full result of the cross is accomplished. What I am is the living source of what I do, and I need as much to be set free from its energy and rule, as I do to be set free from the judgment of my sins. Nay, if the sins be all forgiven, I still am left, able only to produce more unless a further provision is made. This further provision was made at the cross, where “God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin” (not here sins), “condemned sin in the flesh.” It is well to remark that though a single sin may be spoken of, yet sin in the New Testament commonly refers to the nature, and sins to acts. And so using this singular and plural, it would be strictly true, if sharp, to say God never forgives sin, but He judged it at the cross; while also we have the forgiveness of sins through the same sacrifice. In the several passages in the New Testament which refer to this judgment of sin, the past tense should have been employed, thus:

- 6: 2, we that have died to sin.
- “ “ 4, we were buried.
- “ “ 6, has been crucified.
- “ “ 8, if we have died.

- 7: 6, having died in that wherein we were held.
- 2: 19, have died to the law.
- “ “ 20, I have been crucified.
- 2: 20, if ye have died with Christ.
- “ 3: 3, For ye have died.

All these passages refer to the past fact in the work of Christ which grace makes ours now. But the present tense in our language carries another thought also, viz.:—that we are now dead, in a dead condition at this time so far as the “old man” is concerned. This is not so, for still “the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye should not do the things that ye would,” Gal 5: 17.

It has been pleaded specially as to Gal 2: 20, that the Greek perfect tense is there used which carries the continuance of the action on to the present time. True, thank God, He does see, not only that act at the cross most real for us then, but also sees us to-day with that truth of death and judgment to the old man in us most real. It *is* His blessed view of us as now in Christ; just as He could say in Num 23: 21, “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel,” though their iniquity and perverseness had been amazing.

So faith now in us stands on God’s side, and rejoices that the judgment of death was executed on sin in the flesh at our Lord’s crucifixion, and rejoices, too, that God sees this real as to every believer, and real to him in permanence (as the Greek perfect carries) though the old man is not dead, or we should not need to “reckon” it so.

On this solemn and important question, faith sees ourselves as God sees us, and is delighted. Faith is only too glad to discern the blessed provision made, “that henceforth we should not serve sin,” Rom 6: 6, and is equally glad to apply the past fact of Calvary, and in the language of verse 11, say—“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus,” (lit.). So that the Christian path is one of faith, applying to practice perpetually the cross of Christ, “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body,” 2Cor 4: 10.

Did we but make this application faithfully, and truly treat ourselves as dead to sin, how the life of Christ would be made manifest in us, and Christ “be magnified,” Phil 1: 20.

Yet a further grace and privilege are connected in Heb 13: 11, 12, 13, with this part of the sacrifice of the bullock.

“For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp, wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered *without* the gate, let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” We here learn that the fulfilment of the type in its burning outside the camp, is found in the fact that our Lord suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem. This too, was for the purpose of sanctifying (separating) the people with His own blood. This is distinct from making atonement by blood shedding, it is the identification of His own (bought by blood truly) with Himself, the place of his suffering becoming their place too, no longer in the “holy city,” but outside it with Him. It was no part of God’s mind to purge Jerusalem and restore it,

its iniquity was too great. The blood of Christ shed in it would have had power to purge it; but no, He separated Himself from it by going outside, leaving it to its judgment, and those who should get the value of His shed blood would be separated (sanctified) from it too.

It was Golgotha to which He went, “skull place,” a contemptuous term, so known at large, and the Spirit of God points this out to us, claiming our fellowship with our Lord there. It is outside the camp—the place on which Satan and the flesh have put a religious stamp. It is outside the camp in which the popular vote was “Not this man but Barabbas, now Barabba was a robber.” (Yet to-day men say, “Vox populi, vox Dei.” 1:e., the voice of the people is the voice of God. Is that true?)

It is outside the camp, it is the place of reproach. For the world by wisdom knew not God, and crucified the Lord of glory there, putting Him to open shame.

Anticipatively, Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ, and Paul could take pleasure in reproaches for Christ’s sake, and the privilege is ours to take the same place with him, now at the hand of the world. Are we glad to accept His despised position as our own? He “endured the cross, despising the shame”; let the same mind be in us that was also in Him.

Verse 12. “Where the ashes are poured out,”—this is repeated in the verse,—“shall he be burnt.” Lev 6: 11 shows that this was where the daily ashes from the brazen altar were put by the priest. However distinct in certain respects the various sacrifices were, and especially the burnt offering from the sin offering, still there were points in common, and at the last they are found in their ashes together in a clean place, but outside man’s characteristic sphere.

Observe that the skin and the inwards unwashed, are to be included in this burning; a contrast with the burnt offering which will be best seen after considering that sacrifice in chapter 1.

Thus far, we have had before us prefigured in the sin offering:—

- The perfect person of our Lord Jesus.
- The identification of the believer with Him as substitute.
- The believer’s acceptance of death for himself as his own proper due.
- The blood shedding of Christ, the ground of restoration to communion.
- The atonement made by that blood shedding for the believer’s sins, publicly witnessed, and known to the soul.
- The full satisfaction that blood shedding has made for guilt, to the throne and government of God.
- The sweet savour of Christ the measure of the believer’s acceptance.
- And, lastly, the judgment of sin in its nature, for the believer’s deliverance from its power, and separation from the sphere of its rule.

Some of these truths are shown in other offerings as well as in this one, as we shall see; but the main feature of this offering is that of atonement made for transgressions, and testified to the offerer. In the grace of to-day, since the cross, it is part of the birthright of every believer to live and abide in the full sense of his personal forgiveness, through the blood of Christ alone, once purged he is to have no more conscience of sins, no more fear that they will ever be

imputed to him.

What a grace, this, to the weary and sin-laden.