

## ***“What’s This About Sin?”***

### **Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus, Our High Priest**

Leviticus 4

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May 4, 2018

**Jeff:** Our Father and our God, we are thankful for this day. And we’re thankful for every day. But most of all, Lord, we’re thankful for that day on which Your Son was bound to the horns of the altar as the Psalmist says so clearly, that day at Calvary when He was nailed to the cross, whereupon His obedience came to completion and upon Him You poured out Your wrath that we deserved. Father, we are so thankful that You loved us so much that You sent Your Only-Begotten to die for us when we were yet sinners, that we might become children in the family of God.

Father, we’re thankful to be here this morning, to gather in Your presence and to listen to Your word. Father, we pray that having done so that You will work in us a good work, one that You already began and one that You will bring to completion. But in the midst You will work us and shape us and fashion us into the image of Christ Jesus Your Son. So Father, we pray that You will do with us what You will, bringing us into Your conformity, into Your glorious image as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Father, as we open Your word today, we pray that You’ll bless us and strengthen us for it. We also think not only of ourselves under the Word, but we think of those concerns upon our hearts and the hearts of our brothers. And Father, we think of Carl. And we’re thankful that he has made it through that stroke protocol, and we pray that You would continue to bless him with healing.

Father, we think of Dale as he is in the last moments of his life. And we are thankful for his salvation and pray that You will continue to comfort his heart and bless him.

And Father, we think of Rick’s dad, and we pray that You will use him and use others in his life, as You have ordained and so You will bring it to pass, and we pray that it will be for his good.

Father, we ask and pray that You’ll bless us today and strengthen us, as we give our hearts and our minds and our ears and our thoughts to Your word, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Well I have a rather long reading today in Leviticus chapter 4. Now I recognize that in the midst of this reading that your hearts may get all a-flutter. *(Laughter)* So I’m going to ask you to just calm yourselves and steel yourselves against the deep emotions that may just swirl within you as I read these words about the sin offering. *(Laughter)*

And even though I joke about that, may I say that there’s a sense in which our hearts should flutter and swirl as we read these things, because they are certainly the shadows and the types of what the Lord brought to fulfillment in His own life. So let me read to you the word of God from Leviticus chapter 4.

*“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the Lord’s commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them, if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt*

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*on the people, then he shall offer for the sin he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering. He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull, and kill the bull before the LORD. And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it to the tent of meeting. And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part 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, fragrant incense before the LORD that is in the Tent of Meeting. And all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of the burnt offering that is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. And all the fat of the bull of the sin offering he shall remove from it, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the two kidneys with the fat that is upon them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys, just as these are taken from the ox of the sacrifice of the peace offerings. And the priest shall burn them on the altar of the burnt offering. But the skin of the bull and all its flesh with its head, its legs, its entrails and its dung, all the rest of the bull, he shall carry outside of the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and shall burn it up on a fire of wood on the ash heap; it shall be burned up.*

*“If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt, when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering and bring it in front of the Tent of Meeting. And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD. And the bull shall be killed before the LORD. Then the anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the Tent of Meeting. And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD in front of the veil. And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. And the rest of the blood he shall pour out of the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. And all its fat he shall take from it and burn on the altar. Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. And he shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it up as he burned the first bull. It is the sin offering for the assembly.*

*“When a leader sins, doing unintentionally one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish, and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offerings before the LORD. It is a sin offering. Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering. And all its fat he shall burn on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. So the priest shall make atonement for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.*

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“If any one of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the Lord’s commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering. And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of the burnt offering, and pour out all the rest of its blood on the base of the altar. And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offering. And the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

“If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering. Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of the burnt offering, and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the LORD’s food offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.”

**Participant:** This is the word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** All right. Well let’s think about what we’re going to be looking at today. When we think about this text,—and I’m going to go a little broader than this text,—I want you to think a little bit about introductory matters. And then we’ll talk about *the nature of sin*. We’ll talk about *the purification of sin*. And then we’re going to talk about *the sanctified life*. You’ll see that I’m going to pull in some other texts that we’re going to talk about today. But that’s basically our outline. So let’s get some traction here.

Why this study? Well, I have no idea. (*Laughter*) No, no, no. Why this study? Well, we talked a little bit the last time in the book of Hebrews about the Hebrews, and about their position in the wilderness, and about how they didn’t embrace the word of God by faith. And then we talked a little bit about how it was that those people who didn’t embrace it by faith were not like us, as the writer of the Hebrews was saying. He said, “You have embraced this with faith. But be careful that you have embraced it.”

And here’s how you know. You know you’ve embraced it—that is, the promise of the gospel by faith—when your life begins to produce evidence of that, when it begins to produce fruit. And we started to talk about that just a little bit. And you’ll remember that I said to you at that time that there’s a warning here that we need to hear. And that warning can be somewhat distressing. And so I said to you at the time that well, you have to remember that there’s something about the Christian life that parallels the Old Testament life, and that is this. The New Testament life has the expectation of obedience, that we won’t commit high-handed sins, that we won’t commit rebellious sins all the time. That won’t characterize our life. But unintentional sins will characterize us all our life long.

And so having said that, there was a little bit of discussion about that. And so I thought that what we would do is revisit that today and think about that a little bit. And here’s my

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premise for you as we think about that Old Testament text. My premise is that the character of the Christian life is to be characterized by a forward movement of obedience in a right direction.

Let me put it this way. I thought about this. And I thought, how might we characterize this?

Well, let’s say you adopt a child. When you adopt a child, you bring that child into your home. Now up until this time we can see how this parallels the Christian life. I have to ask you this. Am I too loud?

**Participant:** No, you’re okay.

**Jeff:** Okay. I feel too loud. So you go to court. And you’re in court and you’re with that child. And in this case there’s not a justification that happens. But there is an adoption that happens, a legal adoption. And that judge places that child into your home. And you take that child home.

Now that child is legally your child. He or she bears your name, lives in your home and is entitled to your inheritance. This child is your child.

But when you bring that child home that child doesn’t immediately obey all the house rules, because that child doesn’t know all the house rules. And maybe this child is a little bit of a stinker, you know, and has been one at the orphanage, or wherever he has been living. And so you bring him into your home. And it takes him a little while to get used to the house rules. And yet that doesn’t change the fact. If we’re thinking about this in terms of the Christian life, he’s justified. He’s adopted. And there’s a sense in which he’s definitively sanctified.

Now remember what we’ve said in the past about *definitive* sanctification. That is the removal from one sphere, the kingdom of sin, to be deposited into the kingdom of another sphere, and that’s the kingdom of Christ. That’s the definitive breach with the old kingdom that we’re talking about.

So there’s a definitive sanctification that takes place. But there’s also a *progressive* sanctification. In other words, we’re growing into who we are. Remember *The Prince and the Pauper* story. Tom is now a prince because he’s traded with the prince. The prince is now the pauper. And Tom is a prince and he doesn’t know what’s going on. In fact, the royal court thinks that he’s lost his mind because he has no idea how to behave. But he grows in his understanding of the court’s procedures and behaviors. And he becomes what he is, or at least what he’s pretending to be at that point.

The Christian is not pretending. The Christian grows into who he or she is.

But that means this. The point of that is this. That means that the rebellion that characterized us early ought to give way to a life of obedience that will not be characterized by unintentional sins and yes, high-handed sins.

I don’t want to work all that out now in the intro. I want to work that out in the midst of the text. But that at least gives you the flavor of what I’m talking about, okay? So that’s the idea. So more later on that.

So let’s think. We need to think first of all about the procedure here of offering a sacrifice. Now there are ins and outs and nuances to all of this. And it depends on who the

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sacrifice is for and who has brought it, that you do certain things. But there’s a basic lay of the land that I want us to just take in broadly as we think about this.

First of all, we need to understand that the sacrifice is a substitute for us. And one of the things that you need to know, especially as you think broadly, more so beyond this text, is this. This is a classless substitute.

You’ll remember for instance, in Luke’s Gospel, that Joseph and Mary brought two turtledoves for the offering at that point. Why? Because they were poor. And so you have sacrifices that are to be brought for one class. You have sacrifices that are to be brought for a poorer class, and every class in between. And the point is that the substitute is for everyone—not just for one class of persons, but for all classes. And so it’s a classless substitute.

The other thing is—and you know this—the attribute, the key attribute of the sacrifice that’s brought is *without blemish*. It’s to be a perfect sacrifice. And the reason for that is this. It’s very simple. You are supposed to look at that lamb, that bull, that turtledove on the altar, and see a perfect substitute. You’re supposed to understand that that’s not you. But that’s for you. And I think that’s important.

And that leads to the next thing, and that’s this. The basis for our acceptance before God is based on the sacrifice. Do you remember what Malachi says as he sees the people leading those limping lambs with the flies scattered all around their heads? They’ve got sores on them. They’re obviously not offering their best lambs. And they’re leading it down the street to the temple. And the prophet Malachi says, “Hey, try taking that to the governor and offering that as your payment for taxes or whatever,” right? Try doing that for him. That’s something that the Lord is not going to accept.

And then we need to think about *the act of sacrifice*. The key to this is the transference of fault. When I bring the lamb, or when it’s brought by some other person, I notice something. And this is a little bit of the ambiguity here. The question is this. Do I put my hands on the head of this lamb or this sacrifice, or does the priest? There seems to be some level of ambiguity there to the point where it may be the person who brings the sacrifice, and it may be the priest acting on behalf of that person. Nonetheless, hands are laid upon the head of that sacrifice, thus indicating the transference of my sin to that animal, to that perfect animal who is going to bear those as a substitute for me.

And then the blood is caught, you know. There’s the slaughter itself. The blood is caught, and then it’s sprinkled in various places. And we’ll talk about that in just a minute. But it’s also poured around the base of the altar that’s in the courtyard. And we’ll talk again a little bit about that later.

But notice this. In some parts of the sacrifice the head is burned, and so is the fat. And I think there’s a reason for that. And the reason is because you put your hands on the head that is now being burned.

I don’t know how you might have felt when you were watching this sacrifice being burned up on the altar. But I can’t help but think that a pious worshiper would have been looking at that altar and realizing that the best of my flock is on that altar because of my sin. And there must have been something emotionally charged about that, especially when you think about how the man approaches this, or at least in the story of Nathan

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talking to David. He tells the story about how the man had many sheep and the man who had only one ewe lamb. And the ewe lamb was like his own child, right? Remember that? This was like his family. And to think about that, the only ewe lamb you have, the perfect ewe lamb that you have being burned, it must have been an emotional kind of experience.

But we need to remember something, and that’s this. We need to remember that the whole ceremony involved is pointing beyond itself. It’s pointing beyond itself to the Lord Jesus Christ. These are shadows and types and promises and commandments, all of these things that converge and help the Old Testament Israelite, the Old Testament saint, to arrange his behavior in such a way that he fixates beyond even the substitute on the altar, to fixate upon the Lord Jesus Christ or the Messiah who was to come, even if he didn’t know the identity of this One who was to come.

So there’s a sense in which this becomes basically the construct that we need to think about when we think about the offerings themselves. Now that’s a quick tour through that. But I think it’s at least a necessary one when we think about what’s involved here when we think about the sin offering, and what’s involved here when we think about other offerings, because there are many parallels, as you heard read, from this sacrifice to other sacrifices. So before we go any further and actually get into what it was we left off with the last time, do you have any questions or thoughts you want to share about this? No? All right, then. I’m going to take a drink of coffee anyway. (*Laughter*)

Let’s talk about *the nature of sin*. We need to think about this for a minute. And we need to remember that the one thing we’ve said about sin in the past is that it defiles. It pollutes us.

One of the things that I need to understand is that *sin multiplies*. It multiplies in me. And so it has a way of replicating itself in an unhealthy way. It’s like a bad cancer cell, right? You know that cancer cells multiply, and so does sin living in me.

Remember that prior to his conversion, Paul in that part of Romans 7 which speaks about Paul in the past tense, in verses 7-13 Paul says that when the law came and said, “Do not envy,” it didn’t just wake me up to a single occurrence of envy. Do you remember what he says? He says, “It produced all sorts of envy in me.”

It was something akin to stepping on a spider on the sidewalk, and then underneath your shoe watching all of those little baby spiders that had been in its sac spread out over the concrete, right? It’s that one pointer to our failure that produced many others of the same type. And so there’s a sense in which we need to understand that that’s the character of sin.

And it’s not just me, but the book of Leviticus wants us to understand this by pointing to things and places, that sort of thing. This is holy; this area is not holy. This utensil is holy; this utensil is not holy. This place, and so on. So it’s helping us to understand that sin abounds. It grows, it defiles, it pollutes. And that’s what we need to understand.

Now this sin offering is interesting because the word here that’s being used is a verb that has been transformed into a noun. And I need to tell you that Hebrew scholars are sort of like goalies. They’re of their own kind. They’re *sui generis*, right? You know, they function according to their own drumbeat. So the verb transforms into a noun and has a way of reversing the meaning.

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So actually, it’s a de-sin offering. And that’s why some translators call it a *purification* offering. Do you get it? So it’s not a sin offering; it’s a purification offering. It’s de-sin-ning the person, purifying him. That’s the idea.

Now this de-sin offering, this purification offering, has in mind both the idea of *expiation* and *propitiation*. In other words, what we need to understand is that the Old Testament sacrificial system deals with sin in the major two areas where sin needs dealing with.

Now what do I mean by that? Well when we think about expiation, if you look at it in terms of its Latin root, the word means *completely pious*, completely satisfied. In other words, there needs to be a complete dealing with the sin. And *propitiation* means *to take away wrath*. It means to make one propitious toward another.

So there are two elements involved. Let me point out something about when you think about how it is that the sacrificial system is pointing to the way in which God is dealing sin, this pollution in our lives.

First of all, think about this illustration. We’re out in the parking lot. Who do I pick on?

**Participant:** Sig.

**Jeff:** Sig! That’s right! (*Laughter*) That’s good. So I watch Sig. Sig’s leaving early; he’s in a hurry. Sig jumps in his car and, you know, things are a little tight. And he backs up and hits my car and he pulls back in ‘cause he doesn’t have enough room. He backs it up again, this time a little harder so he can get out, and he drives away.

Next Friday I come to Sig. I say, “Sig, you hit my car.”

**Sig:** It was Clouser! (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** And Sig, in his magisterial way of communicating, says, “Jeff, Jeff, I’ll handle it!” And then he comes in and says, “Who does body work?” (*Laughter*)

So when he handles it, he completely deals with it. He completely satisfies me in terms of the body work that needs to be done on my car. But there’s one thing that remains. I’m upset with Sig, right?

So he comes to me. He says, “Brother, I fixed your car.” Expiation.

I say, “Yeah, but I’m a little upset.”

And he says, “Give me a hug.” (*Laughter*) And I say, “Oh, okay.”

But the point is that there are two elements when we think about what needs to be taken care of with regard to sin. Can I say this? It needs to be fixed. But there’s also an element where we need God’s anger appeased. And those two things are both elements that come up again and again when we think about Christ and His atonement, not only dealing with our lack of righteousness, yea, our sin before God and Him taking upon Himself the punishment for that, but also appeasing God’s wrath, that we might come into God’s presence and not encounter His wrath.

So when we think about the purification offering, one of the things that we need to think about is that this is for unintentional sins. Now here’s what I want to say. And this is an important element that I think we have to catch. This word that’s used for *sin* in this particular passage is used—and I lost count; I wasn’t going to count the list again—it’s used at least 75 times in the book of Leviticus alone.

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**Participant:** Wow!

**Jeff:** Now I want you to keep that in mind as we go forward. But my point is that this is the kind of sin, this unintentional transgression, this is the kind of sin that occurs over and over again in the book of Leviticus.

Now the word is *hattat*. But here is what I don’t want you to lose sight of. I don’t want you to lose sight of the fact that all sin requires an offering. All sin requires an atonement.

In order to give you the idea of what this unintentional sin is like, I want you to look—and this is a pretty graphic one!—I want you to look at Deuteronomy chapter 19, verses 4-6.

*“This is the provision for the manslayer, who by fleeing there may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally, without having hated him in the past, as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies, he may flee to one of these cities and live, lest the avenger of blood in hot anger pursue the manslayer and overtake him because the way is long, and strikes him fatally, though the man did not deserve to die, since he had not hated his neighbor in the past.”*

There’s an example of an unintentional sin. Now there are other examples that we might think of when we think of unintentional sins. But the point is that when we think of unintentional sins, we think of those things that we’ve not premeditated, those things that we’ve not planned and purposed.

Now let’s think about this, right? Let’s think about this. You and I both know that we may be struck by a fleeting temptation. And we encounter that temptation. And there may be times where we resist the temptation, or at least we think we resist the temptation. But that temptation continues to come and we haven’t dealt with it sufficiently. We haven’t uprooted it. And then what begins to happen is that in our minds we begin to plan and purpose how we’ll bring about the fruition of the commission of that sin.

That is when we begin to engage in how we’re going to bring about that sin in our lives. That is an intentional, rebellious, high-handed sin against God. What we’re talking about here is sins of an unintentional nature, where we of course sin. Every wrongdoing is sin. But it’s unintentional in nature.

Now if I can be so bold—and you may disagree with this!—that may even be the person who cuts you off. (*Laughter*) And you instinctively yell, right? You’re angry. Now I think that can even account as an unintentional sin. But it says something about your heart condition, right? So it’s coming from somewhere. And it’s indicating something to you about your person, about who you are before the Lord that needs to be dealt with. But I would put even that in the category of the unintentional sin.

Now I want you to think about this. And we could wrap ourselves up in a lot of this conversation. But let me give this example to you. Let’s say that you have a child, and that child does something and sets you off, and you get angry. You respond immediately like that. And you go away and you think to yourself, “I’ve sinned and I need to go to my child.” And you need to say to that child, “I’m sorry. This is why Dad needs the gospel,” right?

And your son says, “Okay, Dad. You’re forgiven.” Then you walk away.



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And then the next time you get into a situation and you respond with “Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra!” And you walk away and you think about it and you say, “I need to go apologize to him. Son, I’m sorry. This is why Dad needs the gospel, too.” And then you walk away.

And then pretty soon, a year or two years down the road, you’re going, “Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra!” “Oh, I need to go apologize to him!” First of all, the child is beginning to wonder if the gospel really works. (*Laughter*) Seriously. And secondly, you ought to be wondering. Is the gospel really at work in my life, such that I respond in the same way every time? In other words, ought there not to be some growth in my response?

And the answer to that is yes. Even if it’s minimal, we ought to see some growth. If I’ve identified my anger toward my child as a problem, it may be the case that it was unintentional but it indicates a problem within me at first. But if I continue to respond in that way, I think that becomes not an unintentional sin, but I know that I fully respond in this way and I have to deal with that in my life.

I realize that this is somewhat of a gray area and difficult to deal with. But I’m trying to paint some examples for you the best I can.

There are two points to remember about this. I think that with unintentional sins, we have to remember that we’re culpable for them. We are culpable for those unintentional sins. The second thing is this. We need to remember that an unintentional sin is not a rebellious sin or a high-handed sin, at least as we think about it.

Now here’s what I want to say to you. This word *peshah* for the high-handed sin only appears twice in the book of Leviticus. And both of those occurrences are in Leviticus 16, wherein once a year we have atonement for high-handed, rebellious sins. And I think the lay of the land indicates something to us. The lay of the land indicates that there is a certain form that ought to take shape with regard to the Christian life. That is growth, whereas high-handed and rebellious sins ought not to characterize us.

Now I know what you’ll say. You’ll say, “But wait a minute! High-handed sins and rebellious sins still characterize my life. I mean, I do commit sins. I sin in thought, word and deed daily, just like the catechism says. And some of them, Jeff, I’ve got to tell you, are high-handed sins.”

And I want to tell you something. I understand that. And I’m with you on that. But what I’m trying to indicate to you is that the Scriptures at this point, the book of Leviticus, is trying to indicate to us that the pattern of the Christian life is not that of high-handed sins. The pattern and the shape of the Christian life is to be characterized by growth, and unintentional sins that are sins nonetheless for which we are culpable.

The difference is this. If you go outside of the book of Leviticus and look in Numbers 14, for instance—Numbers 15, rather,—It’s a rough morning. Let night with the Penguins last night. (*Laughter*) I was glad they didn’t go into overtime. (*Laughter*)

**Participant:** Was that an intentional sin? (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** I’m just ignoring that, Ted. (*Laughter*), “*But if you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments that the LORD has spoken to Moses, all that the LORD has commanded you by Moses from the day that the LORD gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations, then if it was done unintentionally, without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bull from the herd for*

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*a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma to God, with its grain offering and its drink offering according to the rule, and one male goat for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the people of Israel, and they shall be forgiven, because it was a mistake, and they brought their offering, a food offering to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD for their mistake. And all the congregation of the people of Israel shall be forgiven, and the stranger who sojourns among them, because the whole population was involved in the mistake.*

*“If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake. When he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, he shall be forgiven. You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally for him who is native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them.*

*“But the person who does anything with a high hand,”—there’s the *peshah*—“whether he is a native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people, because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment. That person shall be utterly cut off, and his iniquity shall be on him.”*

In other words, the point is that the high-handed, rebellious sin is worthy of being cut off, whether you’re a foreigner or you’re indigenous. Unintentional sins ought to be the regular characterization of a believer, even though in Leviticus 16 once a year we find that *peshah* are sins that are covered on the Day of Atonement. In other words, when you think about it like this, think about how it is that this ought to be the regular characterization. And yet God says, “I know you. And I know that *peshah* characterizes you just as much as *hattat*.”

But how He has set up the sacrificial system is to indicate that it’s once a year that the high-handed, rebellious sins are atoned for. Now that atonement lasts, right? In Christ Jesus that atonement lasts beyond that once per year sacrifice, if we believe in the promise of the One who is coming, who is prefigured in the type and the shadow. But the point is that He’s teaching them something. This is didactic. And what is He teaching them? He’s teaching them what the Christian life ought to look like.

And so I want us to think a little bit about *the purification*. Don’t

**Don:** Just for clarification, what do you think the Lord meant by “cut off?” Capital punishment, or excommunication, or what?

**Jeff:** Well, I think that’s oftentimes defined according to the sin in the Scriptures. So I think that in some ways it’s characterized by the sin itself. I think I’ll just leave it there. Bill had something. He’s good, though. Okay.

So let’s think about this. I want you to realize that there’s some overlap with other offerings. But there’s one point in particular that I want to point out. There’s a graded approach to sin and purification in this particular chapter that we’re looking at. There’s the leader and the individual. And the sin offering that the leader and the individual offer, the blood that is taken from that offering, is applied to the altar in the courtyard.

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Think about this picture. So there’s the altar in the courtyard. It stands outside of the Holy Place. It certainly stands outside of the Holy of Holies. But it’s applied to the altar of burnt offering.

Notice this. The priest and the congregation, the blood that’s taken from their sin offerings, is applied to the curtain of the Holy of Holies. Why? Because the blood of the leader or the individual was for them alone. But the priest represents the whole congregation, just as the whole congregation represents the whole congregation. And remember, these are unintentional sins. And that means that the blood needs to be taken up to the very curtain of the Holy of Holies right there, and offered before the very throne of God.

My point in saying this to you is that rebellious and unintentional sins require atonement of a magnitude that says that you need to take this right up to the Holy Place, the footstool of God’s throne, because sin needs to be atoned for in that sense.

I want you to think about this. We’ve looked at one offering in a very peripheral way. And the point I want to make to you is this. There are a number of offerings at the beginning. And then there are statutes about mold and mildew. There are statutes about scabs and sores. There are all kinds of statutes that you look at. And one of the things that we’re being taught is that no one offering, and no one explanation of sin in terms of mold, for instance, can capture the magnitude of sin or the greatness of grace revealed in Jesus Christ that must atone for that sin.

And so when we think about the purification or the de-sin offering, we need to remember that there’s a seriousness. We need to look beyond that and see it fulfilled in Christ.

Let me just say a couple of things about the sanctified life. And the first is that *sin is sin and sin needs atonement*. I’ve said that to you already. There are sins and there are consequences. But we need to think about the fact that even in the New Testament we see that there’s a gradation of sinfulness, and there’s a gradation of the consequences of sin.

For instance, think about it like this. There are some people who argue that lust is a legitimate reason for a woman to divorce a man. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard that, but I’ve heard people trying to argue that a number of times. I’ve even heard pastors argue for that. And what I typically say to them is, “Well, if you stay with the Sermon on the Mount, then that means that anger can be punished corporally.”

**Participant:** Right.

**Jeff:** Right. So I would say that even though anger is a root of murder, and lust is a root of adultery, there are different consequences. And we ought to be looking at them in terms of different degrees. Jonathan Edwards used to talk about the degrees of the sufferer in hell. And I think that corresponds to our understanding of sin and its consequences in this life.

There are two different types of sin. There are sins of omission, when I omit the things that God has commanded me to do. And there are sins of commission, when I commit something contrary to God’s law. And both of those can be unintentional sins, but sins nonetheless.

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Why this gradation? Well, I’ve been telling you this as we’ve gone along. I think that what we’re supposed to understand is that *the believing life is a growing life*. And we are to be subduing that in us which is rebellious and high-handed.

And you say to me, “But Jeff, this is not going to be subdued until we die.” And I totally agree. But I want to show you something that I saw R. C. Sproul do one time, okay?

I don’t know if we ever did this before or not. I don’t think so. Tom, go down there by my coat. All right, Tom is going to be Jesus.

**Participant:** That’s a stretch. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Sig, come on down here. *\*(Laughter)* Bill, come on over here. Sig’s not coming.

**Sig:** Oh, you were serious. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** Why don’t you just stick in that book? *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Okay. Bill is my representative for being initially saved. And he’s that far away from Christ, okay? The sanctified life looks like this, right? It’s three steps forward, two steps back, right? All right?

Now by the time I have a regular life and I die, how far am I going to be to Christ?

**Participant:** Closer. Closer than when you started.

**Jeff:** I’m going to be closer than when I started, but how close am I going to be?

**Participant:** Pretty far.

**Jeff:** Pretty far away when I die, right? But I’m still going to have advanced. I’m going to be far away from the goal, right? I’m going to be far away from the goal, but I’m going to have advanced beyond my position. I’m going to have grown in the Christian life. To say that I’m going to be saved at this point and die at this point is not the Christian life. I have to advance. Okay, thank you.

**Participant:** Jeff, wait a second. Because existentially, as we experience it, that’s what happens.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** There is very little progression. But in fact,-- My leg just went to sleep; that’s weird. *(Laughter)* In fact, Bill has been already put over here.

**Jeff:** Oh, sure! Absolutely.

**Participant:** In fact, this is the ultimate truth. He’s here. But he just hasn’t experienced it yet. I mean, that is just the foundational truth, that in essence we are already in Christ.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** Existentially; that means as we experience it, we may appear to make very little progress.

**Jeff:** Yes. Go ahead, Tom.

**Tom:** But in actuality, instead of trying this way, doesn’t Christ come to you? *“If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father.”*

**Jeff:** Yes, sure.

**Tom:** So I mean, He’s coming again.

**Jeff:** Yes, but it depends on if you’re Bill McCoy or not. *(Laughter)*

**Bill:** Since you mentioned my name, *(laughter)*, the progress you make,--

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**Jeff:** Maturity, right?

**Bill:** Is that because of you or in spite of you? *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** It’s definitely monergistic at its very core, but synergistic in the process. *(Cheers and applause)*

**Bill:** Politics! *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** So faith leads to fruit. Go ahead.

**Participant:** This may put a little bit of a fly in the ointment. I was preaching one time about the first word of Christ on the cross on Good Friday. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* Normally I’ve heard sermons talking about the forgiveness aspect. At this particular time that I was preaching I was kind of wrestling with *“for they know not what they do.”* It seems as though He is identifying forgiveness with those unintentional sins, and that aspect of things. So that kind of raises in my mind a question, based on the fact that there’s a time and intention, and He seems to be identifying with the time aspect of things. Also Hebrews 10:26. *“If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving a knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”*

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Participant:** But it fits with what you’re saying, that the sanctified life should be one of progress. And when we recognize the *peshah* we should turn away from it. I’m just wondering. How does that unintentional/unintentional aspect fit into Christ’s first words on the cross? I haven’t really been able to come up with something that’s satisfactory to me on that.

**Jeff:** Yes. I mean, let’s think about it in terms of “they didn’t recognize Me.” And so there’s an unintentionality to it, right?

But let’s think about it like this. In order for them to receive the forgiveness of God, they have to repent of it. So actually, not only is there a nonrecognition of the unintentionality of it, but there’s a high-handedness to it in the sense that we’re not even going to recognize this: that we’ve missed the Messiah. So I think that even in the charity that Christ may put on it, if we understand it that way,--and that’s a great point; I hadn’t thought about it in light of Christ’s words. But I’m just responding in terms of off the cuff. If indeed He is looking at them in the most charitable way, then you can still look at it like they’ve not received it, because they’ve not acknowledged it. There’s a high-handedness to it in the rejection of it, even in His saying it. Anybody else? Yes?

**Participant:** This is kind of off the wall, but just a question. If we’re talking about *peshah* and the aggressive and high-handed sin, if in fact we make real progress on that, then could the futuristic look at that sin be classified as unintentional?

**Jeff:** Well, I think for instance that the recognition of the Day of Atonement once a year, and Christ’s alignment with that, is the recognition that our lives are going to entail high-handed, rebellious sins. I mean, think about that. If I were to go back into the Rolodex, it’s not very far back that I can imagine committing an intentional sin, right? I may have been tempted and had good intention and purpose to do it, or responded in a way and with a kind of pattern that should have been put to death a long time ago. That

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sort of thing, right? All of that indicates the reality of the kinds of sin that I deal with. And I think that this is just a paradigm. The Christian life is never according to my understanding of it. It’s always according to the pattern that God says. And my life has to conform to that pattern. But it’s in the process of being shaped and conformed into that pattern. Does that make sense?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Jeff:** Okay. So let’s go back to the analogy of—Oh, I know what I was going to tell you. Someone brought up 1 Timothy 1:15. You go to that progression and Paul says, “I’m the chief of sinners; I’m the worst of sinners.” Well, it’s like Ted was saying. Not only is the indicative that I’m seated in Christ in the heavenlies now. The imperative is to stretch to the heavenlies, right?—to become what I already am in Jesus Christ. But the more I become what I am in Jesus Christ, the worse I feel!

**Participant:** Yes.

**Jeff:** And why is that? It’s because the presence of sin remains. And the closer I draw to the holy, the more I doubt my deeds! So you also have to deal with that experiential aspect that Ted mentioned earlier. But it has this kind of reversal to it when we think about our own experience in this.

You see how this is. We could have done a series on this. It’s that full. I’m finished. Yes, Sig?

The closer we get to God, the worse we feel, because we’re starting to unpack and uncover this trash in our lives that we never really dealt with or identified or knew about. Now, all of a sudden, it’s out there. We’re very aware of it. We’re aware of our contrast—me a sinful man and God being holy, and it’s overwhelming.

**Jeff:** Yes. Actually, when you look at Isaiah chapter 6, the interesting thing about Isaiah 6 is “*Woe to me, for I am undone.*” But the newer translations like the ESV say, “*Woe to me, for I am lost.*” And they’re translating it this way because there are three other places in the Old Testament that translate that word as “*I am cut off.*” And the question is this. How is it the case that a believer is cut off, if we really believe that Isaiah is a believer?

And I think that what he’s saying is that he’s saying something that is intentionally contrasting with the holiness of God. God is cut off or separate from all that is immoral or unclean, right? And what he is saying is, “*I am cut off.*”

Cut off from what? In the recognition of the filthiness of his mouth, he’s cut off from God’s holiness. It’s not in a salvific way, but I think it’s that existential recognition that God is holy and I’m not, that kind of thing.

**Participant:** (*Unclear.*)

**Second Participant:** Bishop Stanley used to say this to us. He said, “*God will give you the desires of your heart, or He will change the desires of your heart.*” (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** Yeah, right.

**Participant:** And one way to look at measuring progress is that you might ask yourself, “What did I once desire that I no longer desire?”

**Jeff:** Yes. And you know, that’s very true. Stay close, Bishop, because if you want to respond back to this, this is good. Let me make this comment. But it has a question in it.

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My understanding is that regeneration brings purification from sin. And so when we think about regeneration, we think about purification.

But when you think about the concept of the human, there’s the mind, there’s the will and the emotions. And it’s almost as if, despite the fact that our emotions or our affections have been purified, that there’s a primacy of the mind. It’s almost like it’s the first among equals when you think about the complex of the mind and the will and the emotions. It’s the first among equals, such that Paul says, *“I delight in the Law in my mind. But in my affections I want what is contrary to the Law.”*

So in terms of the Christian life, it seems that we ought to think of it as the affections are cleansed. But do you think that it’s that sin, the remaining presence of sin, that entices our affections and enables us to rope them away from us in terms of our emotions more so than our minds? What is it about our emotions that are so easily captivated, versus the captivation of our thoughts? Does that make sense? Do you have a thought on that?

**Participant:** No. *(Laughter)* I can say something, but I’m not sure I’ve really thought it through.

**Jeff:** Yes. Okay. Anything else? Yes?

**Participant:** My understanding is that Wycliffe Bible Translators used to just work on the New Testament. And they realized over time that the Christians were inadequate in their development, and that they needed to begin translating the Old Testament too, because without the Old Testament the believers did not have an adequate sense of what sin was.

**Jeff:** Yes. Not 100%, right? I mean, how are you going to understand that Hebrews 10 passage that was read earlier without understanding the idea of unintentional sins and high-handed sins? You know what I mean? Okay, is that good?

Let’s pray. Yes?

**Participant:** What would the Israelite have done if he found himself constantly having to deal with the high-handed sins? I mean, he goes almost daily with the unintentional sins. But he finds himself struggling with the high-handed sin. How does he deal with that in light of the fact that so much of the Old Testament talks about the unintentional sins. You know, he can appease himself by saying, “Well, I didn’t mean it.” You know what I’m saying?

**Jeff:** Wait a minute. Don’t take the mike away. I’m not actually clear. Are you talking about him in his experience?

**Second Participant:** How does he cope with the fact that he is sinning in an intentional way?

**Jeff:** How does he deal with the fact that he keeps committing sin? I think what he has to do is this. Take it back to the father who continually gets angry with his son. I think what he has to do is get alone with God and say, “What needs to happen in my life for me to break this pattern, even if I don’t fully break it,” right? But I chip away at it, right? What progress--

**Participant:** Isn’t that assuming, when we talk about the house of Israel, are we assuming that they’re all redeemed or unredeemed?

**Jeff:** Oh no!

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**Participant:** If you have an unredeemed Israelite who is struggling, he understands the unintentional sins.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** But he sees himself constantly being willful and high-handed.

**Jeff:** I think if it’s public, that’s the Numbers 15 passage. He needs to be cut off from the community. I mean that’s what it said, right? If he commits a high-handed sin, that brother is not a brother. He needs to be put out.

**Participant:** But a lot of high-handed sin is private.

**Jeff:** Yes, right. Absolutely.

**Participant:** How are they to know?

**Jeff:** That’s right. But God knows, right? And there are people like that in the church, right? Let’s face it. There are people in the church who are willfully and deliberately sinning against the knowledge of God in a high-handed way. And they’re hiding it.

Ministers get exposed like this all the time, right? There was a minister who was honored by many in Reformed circles where I’m from. And it was revealed that he was sinning on multiple levels. And in order to escape the shame, he took his own life. And so, you know, no one knew. But God knew. So there’s a situation where there wasn’t real repentance. So you leave it between him and God, right? But the fact of the matter is that this was a clear incidence of what you’re talking about in a New Testament setting.

**Participant:** Well I don’t know if I actually communicated my intention.

**Jeff:** Does that make sense, though?

**Participant:** What you just said makes sense. But I don’t know if I communicated—

**Jeff:** Well, the bishop got it. *(Laughter)*

Let me pray briefly and we’ll dismiss. Father in heaven, thank You for this day. Bless our time to us. And Father, as we think about this difficult and very broad subject, we pray that You’ll give us some understanding from the morning, and some understanding, that we might not just have it cognitively, but that we might apply it to our lives and see still yet more conformity to Christ. We ask it in His name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*